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*THE COMEDY OF HUMAN LIFE*

By H. DE BALZAC

---

SCENES FROM PRIVATE LIFE

---

A DAUGHTER OF EVE

A COMMISSION IN LUNACY

THE RURAL BALL

# BALZAC'S NOVELS.

Translated by Miss K. P. WORMELEY.

*Already Published:*

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DUCHESS DE LANGEAIS.  
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FERRAGUS, CHIEF OF THE DÉVORANTS.  
A START IN LIFE.  
THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT.  
BEATRIX.  
DAUGHTER OF EVE.

---

ROBERTS BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,  
BOSTON.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

TRANSLATED BY

KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY

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" A DAUGHTER OF EVE "



ROBERTS BROTHERS

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BOSTON

1895

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TO MADAME LA COMTESSE BOLOGNINI,  
NÉE VIMERCATI.

IF you remember, madame, the pleasure your conversation gave to a traveller by recalling Paris to his memory in Milan, you will not be surprised to find him testifying his gratitude for many pleasant evenings passed beside you by laying one of his works at your feet, and begging you to protect it with your name, as in former days that name protected the tales of an ancient writer dear to the Milanese.

You have an Eugénie, already beautiful, whose intelligent smile gives promise that she has inherited from you the most precious gifts of womanhood, and who will certainly enjoy during her childhood and youth all those happinesses which a rigid mother denied to the Eugénie of these pages. Though Frenchmen are taxed with inconstancy, you will find me Italian in faithfulness and memory. While writing the name of "Eugénie," my thoughts have often led me back to that cool stuccoed salon and little garden in the Vicolo dei Cappucini, which echoed to the laughter of that dear child, to our sportive quarrels and our chatter. But you have left the Corso for the Tre Monasteri, and I know not how you are placed there; consequently, I am forced to think of you, not among the charming things with which no doubt you have surrounded yourself, but like one of those fine figures due to Raffaello, Titian, Correggio, Allori, which seem abstractions, so distant are they from our daily lives.

If this book should wing its way across the Alps, it will prove to you the lively gratitude and respectful friendship of

Your devoted servant,

DE BALZAC.



# A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

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## I.

### THE TWO MARIES.

IN one of the finest houses of the rue Neuve-des-Mathurins, at half-past eleven at night, two young women were sitting before the fireplace of a boudoir hung with blue velvet of that tender shade, with shimmering reflections, which French industry has lately learned to fabricate. Over the doors and windows were draped soft folds of blue cashmere, the tint of the hangings, the work of one of those upholsterers who have just missed being artists. A silver lamp studded with turquoise, and suspended by chains of beautiful workmanship, hung from the centre of the ceiling. The same system of decoration was followed in the smallest details, and even to the ceiling of fluted blue silk, with long bands of white cashmere falling at equal distances on the hangings, where they were caught back by ropes of pearl. A warm Belgian carpet, thick as turf, of a gray ground with blue posies, covered the floor. The furniture, of carved ebony, after a fine model of the old school, gave substance and richness to the rather too decorative quality, as a painter might call it, of the rest of the room. On either side of a large window, two

étagères displayed a hundred precious trifles, flowers of mechanical art brought into bloom by the fire of thought. On a chimney-piece of slate-blue marble were figures in old Dresden, shepherds in bridal garb, with delicate bouquets in their hands, German fantasticalities surrounding a platinum clock, inlaid with arabesques. Above it sparkled the brilliant facets of a Venice mirror framed in ebony, with figures carved in relief, evidently obtained from some former royal residence. Two jardinières were filled with the exotic product of a hot-house, pale, but divine flowers, the treasures of botany.

In this cold, orderly boudoir, where all things were in place as if for sale, no sign existed of the gay and capricious disorder of a happy home. At the present moment, the two young women were weeping. Pain seemed to predominate. The name of the owner, Ferdinand du Tillet, one of the richest bankers in Paris, is enough to explain the luxury of the whole house, of which this boudoir is but a sample.

Though without either rank or station, having pushed himself forward, heaven knows how, du Tillet had married, in 1831, the daughter of the Comte de Granville, one of the greatest names in the French magistracy, — a man who became peer of France after the revolution of July. This marriage of ambition on du Tillet's part was brought about by his agreeing to sign an acknowledgment in the marriage contract of a dowry not received, equal to that of her elder sister, who was married to Comte Félix de Vandenesse. On the other hand, the Granvilles obtained the alliance with de Vandenesse by the largeness of the *dot*. Thus

the bank repaired the breach made in the pocket of the magistracy by rank. Could the Comte de Vandenesse have seen himself, three years later, the brother-in-law of a *Sieur Ferdinand du Tillet*, so-called, he might not have married his wife; but what man of rank in 1828 foresaw the strange upheavals which the year 1830 was destined to produce in the political condition, the fortunes, and the customs of France? Had any one predicted to Comte Félix de Vandenesse that his head would lose the coronet of a peer, and that of his father-in-law acquire one, he would have thought his informant a lunatic.

Bending forward on one of those low chairs then called *chauffeuses*, in the attitude of a listener, Madame du Tillet was pressing to her bosom with maternal tenderness, and occasionally kissing, the hand of her sister, Madame Félix de Vandenesse. Society added the baptismal name to the surname, in order to distinguish the countess from her sister-in-law, the Marquise Charles de Vandenesse, wife of the former ambassador, who had married the widow of the Comte de Kergarouët, Mademoiselle Émilie de Fontaine.

Half lying on a sofa, her handkerchief in the other hand, her breathing choked by repressed sobs, and with tearful eyes, the countess had been making confidences such as are made only from sister to sister when two sisters love each other; and these two sisters did love each other tenderly. We live in days when sisters married into such antagonist spheres can very well not love each other, and therefore the historian is bound to relate the reasons of this tender affection,



preserved without spot or jar in spite of their husbands' contempt for each other and their own social disunion. A rapid glance at their childhood will explain the situation.

Brought up in a gloomy house in the Marais, by a woman of narrow mind, a *dévot*e who, being sustained by a sense of duty (sacred phrase!), had fulfilled her tasks as a mother religiously, Marie-Angélique and Marie Eugénie de Granville reached the period of their marriage — the first at eighteen, the second at twenty years of age — without ever leaving the domestic zone where the rigid maternal eye controlled them. Up to that time they had never been to a play; the churches of Paris were their theatre. Their education in their mother's house had been as rigorous as it would have been in a convent. From infancy they had slept in a room adjoining that of the Comtesse de Granville, the door of which stood always open. The time not occupied by the care of their persons, their religious duties and the studies considered necessary for well-bred young ladies, was spent in needlework done for the poor, or in walks like those an Englishwoman allows herself on Sunday, saying, apparently, "Not so fast, or we shall seem to be amusing ourselves."

Their education did not go beyond the limits imposed by confessors, who were chosen by their mother from the strictest and least tolerant of the Jansenist priests. Never were girls delivered over to their husbands more absolutely pure and virgin than they; their mother seemed to consider that point, essential as indeed it is, the accomplishment of all her duties toward earth and heaven. These two poor creatures

had never, before their marriage, read a tale, or heard of a romance; their very drawings were of figures whose anatomy would have been masterpieces of the impossible to Cuvier, designed to feminize the Farnese Hercules himself. An old maid taught them drawing. A worthy priest instructed them in grammar, the French language, history, geography, and the very little arithmetic it was thought necessary in their rank for women to know. Their reading, selected from authorized books, such as the "*Lettres Édifiantes*," and Noël's "*Leçons de Littérature*," was done aloud in the evening; but always in presence of their mother's confessor, for even in those books there did sometimes occur passages which, without wise comments, might have roused their imagination. Fénelon's "*Télémaque*" was thought dangerous.

The Comtesse de Granville loved her daughters sufficiently to wish to make them angels after the pattern of Marie Alacoque, but the poor girls themselves would have preferred a less virtuous and more amiable mother. This education bore its natural fruits. Religion, imposed as a yoke and presented under its sternest aspect, wearied with formal practice these innocent young hearts, treated as sinful. It repressed their feelings, and was never precious to them, although it struck its roots deep down into their natures. Under such training the two Mariés would either have become mere imbeciles, or they must necessarily have longed for independence. Thus it came to pass that they looked to marriage as soon as they saw anything of life and were able to compare a few ideas. Of their own tender graces and their personal

value they were absolutely ignorant. They were ignorant, too, of their own innocence; how, then, could they know life? Without weapons to meet misfortune, without experience to appreciate happiness, they found no comfort in the maternal jail, all their joys were in each other. Their tender confidences at night in whispers, or a few short sentences exchanged if their mother left them for a moment, contained more ideas than the words themselves expressed. Often a glance, concealed from other eyes, by which they conveyed to each other their emotions, was like a poem of bitter melancholy. The sight of a cloudless sky, the fragrance of flowers, a turn in the garden, arm in arm, — these were their joys. The finishing of a piece of embroidery was to them a source of enjoyment.

Their mother's social circle, far from opening resources to their hearts or stimulating their minds, only darkened their ideas and depressed them; it was made up of rigid old women, withered and graceless, whose conversation turned on the differences which distinguished various preachers and confessors, on their own petty indispositions, on religious events insignificant even to the "*Quotidienne*" or "*l'Ami de la Religion*." As for the men who appeared in the Comtesse de Granville's salon, they extinguished any possible torch of love, so cold and sadly resigned were their faces. They were all of the age when mankind is sulky and fretful, and natural sensibilities are chiefly exercised at table and on the things relating to personal comfort. Religious egotism had long dried up those hearts devoted to narrow duties and intrenched behind pious practices. Silent games of cards occu-

pied the whole evening, and the two young girls under the ban of that Sanhedrim enforced by maternal severity, came to hate the dispiriting personages about them with their hollow eyes and scowling faces.

On the gloom of this life one sole figure of a man, that of a music-master, stood vigorously forth. The confessors had decided that music was a Christian art, born of the Catholic Church and developed within her. The two Maries were therefore permitted to study music. A spinster in spectacles, who taught singing and the piano in a neighboring convent, wearied them with exercises; but when the eldest girl was ten years old, the Comte de Granville insisted on the importance of giving her a master. Madame de Granville gave all the value of conjugal obedience to this needed concession, — it is part of a *dévoté's* character to make a merit of doing her duty.

The master was a Catholic German; one of those men born old, who seem all their lives fifty years of age even at eighty. And yet, his brown, sunken, wrinkled face still kept something infantile and artless in its dark creases. The blue of innocence was in his eyes, and a gay smile of springtide abode upon his lips. His iron-gray hair, falling naturally like that of the Christ in art, added to his ecstatic air a certain solemnity which was absolutely deceptive as to his real nature; for he was capable of committing any silliness with the most exemplary gravity. His clothes were a necessary envelope, to which he paid not the slightest attention, for his eyes looked too high among the clouds to concern themselves with such materialities. This great unknown artist belonged to

the kindly class of the self-forgetting, who give their time and their soul to others, just as they leave their gloves on every table and their umbrella at all doors. His hands were of the kind that are dirty as soon as washed. In short, his old body, badly poised on its knotty old legs, proving to what degree a man can make it the mere accessory of his soul, belonged to those strange creations which have been properly depicted only by a German, — by Hoffmann, the poet of that which seems not to exist but yet has life.

Such was Schmucke, formerly chapel-master to the Margrave of Anspach; a musical genius, who was now examined by a council of *dévotés*, and asked if he kept the fasts. The master was much inclined to answer, "Look at me!" but how could he venture to joke with pious dowagers and Jansenist confessors? This apocryphal old fellow held such a place in the lives of the two Maries, they felt such friendship for the grand and simple-minded artist, who was happy and contented in the mere comprehension of his art, that after their marriage, they each gave him an annuity of three hundred francs a year, — a sum which sufficed to pay for his lodging, beer, pipes, and clothes. Six hundred francs a year and his lessons put him in Eden. Schmucke had never found courage to confide his poverty and his aspirations to any but these two adorable young girls, whose hearts were blooming beneath the snow of maternal rigor and the ice of devotion. This fact explains Schmucke and the girlhood of the two Maries.

No one knew then, or later, what abbé or pious spinster had discovered the old German then vaguely

wandering about Paris, but as soon as mothers of families learned that the Comtesse de Granville had found a music-master for her daughters, they all inquired for his name and address. Before long, Schmucke had thirty pupils in the Marais. This tardy success was manifested by steel buckles to his shoes, which were lined with horse-hair soles, and by a more frequent change of linen. His artless gayety, long suppressed by noble and decent poverty, reappeared. He gave vent to witty little remarks and flowery speeches in his German-Gallic patois, very observing and very quaint and said with an air which disarmed ridicule. But he was so pleased to bring a laugh to the lips of his two pupils, whose dismal life his sympathy had penetrated, that he would gladly have made himself wilfully ridiculous had he failed in being so by nature.

According to one of the nobler ideas of religious education, the young girls always accompanied their master respectfully to the door. There they would make him a few kind speeches, glad to do anything to give him pleasure. Poor things! all they could do was to show him their womanhood. Until their marriage, music was to them another life within their lives, just as, they say, a Russian peasant takes his dreams for reality and his actual life for a troubled sleep. With the instinct of protecting their souls against the pettiness that threatened to overwhelm them, against the all-pervading asceticism of their home, they flung themselves into the difficulties of the musical art, and spent themselves upon it. Melody, harmony, and composition, three daughters of heaven, whose choir

was led by an old German-Catholic faun drunk with music, were to these poor girls the compensation of their trials; they made them, as it were, a rampart against their daily lives. Mozart, Beethoven, Gluck, Paësiello, Cimarosa, Haydn, and certain secondary geniuses, developed in their souls a passionate emotion which never passed beyond the chaste inclosure of their breasts, though it permeated that other creation through which, in spirit, they winged their flight. When they had executed some great work in a manner that their master declared was almost faultless, they embraced each other in ecstasy and the old man called them his Saint Cecílias.

The two Maries were not taken to a ball until they were sixteen years of age, and then only four times a year in special houses. They were not allowed to leave their mother's side without instructions as to their behavior with their partners; and so severe were these instructions that they dared say only yes or no during a dance. The eye of the countess never left them, and she seemed to know from the mere movement of their lips the words they uttered. Even the ball-dresses of these poor little things were piously irreproachable; their muslin gowns came up to their chins with an endless number of thick ruches, and the sleeves came down to their wrists. Swathing in this way their natural charms, this costume gave them a vague resemblance to Egyptian hermæ; though from these blocks of muslin rose enchanting little heads of tender melancholy. They felt themselves the objects of pity, and inwardly resented it. What woman, however innocent, does not desire to excite envy?

No dangerous idea, unhealthy or even equivocal, soiled the pure pulp of their brain; their hearts were innocent. their hands were horribly red, and they glowed with health. Eve did not issue more innocent from the hands of God than these two girls from their mother's home when they went to the mayor's office and the church to be married, after receiving the simple but terrible injunction to obey in all things two men with whom they were henceforth to live and sleep by day and by night. To their minds, nothing could be worse in the strange houses where they were to go than the maternal convent.

Why did the father of these poor girls, the Comte de Granville, a wise and upright magistrate (though sometimes led away by politics), refrain from protecting the helpless little creatures from such crushing despotism? Alas! by mutual understanding, about ten years after marriage, he and his wife were separated while living under one roof. The father had taken upon himself the education of his sons, leaving that of the daughters to the wife. He saw less danger for women than for men in the application of his wife's oppressive system. The two Maries, destined as women to endure tyranny, either of love or marriage, would be, he thought, less injured than boys, whose minds ought to have freer play, and whose manly qualities would deteriorate under the powerful compression of religious ideas pushed to their utmost consequences. Of four victims the count saved two.

The countess regarded her sons as too ill-trained to admit of the slightest intimacy with their sisters. All communication between the poor children was



therefore strictly watched. When the boys came home from school, the count was careful not to keep them in the house. The boys always breakfasted with their mother and sisters, but after that the count took them off to museums, theatres, restaurants, or, during the summer season, into the country. Except on the solemn days of some family festival, such as the countess's birthday or New Year's day, or the day of the distribution of prizes, when the boys remained in their father's house and slept there, the sisters saw so little of their brothers that there was absolutely no tie between them. On those days the countess never left them for an instant alone together. Calls of "Where is Angélique?" — "What is Eugénie about?" — "Where are my daughters?" resounded all day. As for the mother's sentiments toward her sons, the countess raised to heaven her cold and macerated eyes, as if to ask pardon of God for not having snatched them from iniquity.

Her exclamations, and also her reticences on the subject of her sons, were equal to the most lamenting verses in Jeremiah, and completely deceived the sisters, who supposed their sinful brothers to be doomed to perdition.

When the boys were eighteen years of age, the count gave them rooms in his own part of the house, and sent them to study law under the supervision of a solicitor, his former secretary. The two Maries knew nothing therefore of fraternity, except by theory. At the time of the marriage of the sisters, both brothers were practising in provincial courts, and both were detained by important cases. Domestic life in many

families which might be expected to be intimate, united, and homogeneous, is really spent in this way. Brothers are sent to a distance, busy with their own careers, their own advancement, occupied, perhaps, about the good of the country; the sisters are engrossed in a round of other interests. All the members of such a family live disunited, forgetting one another, bound together only by some feeble tie of memory, until, perhaps, a sentiment of pride or self-interest either joins them or separates them in heart as they already are in fact. Modern laws, by multiplying the family by the family, has created a great evil, — namely, individualism.

In the depths of this solitude where their girlhood was spent, Angélique and Eugénie seldom saw their father, and when he did enter the grand apartment of his wife on the first floor, he brought with him a saddened face. In his own home he always wore the grave and solemn look of a magistrate on the bench. When the little girls had passed the age of dolls and toys, when they began, about twelve, to use their minds (an epoch at which they ceased to laugh at Schmucke) they divined the secret of the cares that lined their father's forehead, and they recognized beneath that mask of sternness the relics of a kind heart and a fine character. They vaguely perceived how he had yielded to the forces of religion in his household, disappointed as he was in his hopes as a husband, and wounded in the tenderest fibres of paternity, — the love of a father for his daughters. Such griefs were singularly moving to the hearts of the two young girls, who were themselves deprived of all tenderness. Some-

times, when pacing the garden between his daughters, with an arm round each little waist, and stepping with their own short steps, the father would stop short behind a clump of trees, out of sight of the house, and kiss them on their foreheads; his eyes, his lips, his whole countenance expressing the deepest commiseration.

"You are not very happy, my dear little girls," he said one day; "but I shall marry you early. It will comfort me to have you leave home."

"Papa," said Eugénie, "we have decided to take the first man who offers."

"Ah!" he cried, "that is the bitter fruit of such a system. They want to make saints, and they make —" he stopped without ending his sentence.

Often the two girls felt an infinite tenderness in their father's "Adieu," or in his eyes, when, by chance, he dined at home. They pitied that father so seldom seen, and love follows often upon pity.

This stern and rigid education was the cause of the marriages of the two sisters welded together by misfortune, as Rita-Christina by the hand of Nature. Many men, driven to marriage, prefer a girl taken from a convent, and saturated with piety, to a girl brought up to worldly ideas. There seems to be no middle course. A man must marry either an educated girl, who reads the newspapers and comments upon them, who waltzes with a dozen young men, goes to the theatre, devours novels, cares nothing for religion, and makes her own ethics, or an ignorant and innocent young girl, like either of the two Maries. Perhaps there may be as much danger with the one

kind as with the other. Yet the vast majority of men who are not so old as Arnolphe, prefer a religious Agnes to a budding Célimène.

The two Maries, who were small and slender, had the same figure, the same foot, the same hand. Eugénie, the younger, was fair-haired, like her mother, Angélique was dark-haired, like the father. But they both had the same complexion, — a skin of the pearly whiteness which shows the richness and purity of the blood, where the color rises through a tissue like that of the jasmine, soft, smooth, and tender to the touch. Eugénie's blue eyes and the brown eyes of Angélique had an expression of artless indifference, of ingenuous surprise, which was rendered by the vague manner with which the pupils floated on the fluid whiteness of the eyeball. They were both well-made; the rather thin shoulders would develop later. Their throats, long veiled, delighted the eye when their husbands requested them to wear low dresses to a ball, on which occasion they both felt a pleasing shame, which made them first blush behind closed doors, and afterwards, through a whole evening in company.

On the occasion when this scene opens, and the eldest, Angélique, was weeping, while the younger, Eugénie, was consoling her, their hands and arms were white as milk. Each had nursed a child, — one a boy, the other a daughter. Eugénie, as a girl, was thought very giddy by her mother, who had therefore treated her with especial watchfulness and severity. In the eyes of that much-feared mother, Angélique, noble and proud, appeared to have a soul so lofty that it would guard itself, whereas, the more lively Eugénie needed

restraint. There are many charming beings misused by fate,— beings who ought by rights to prosper in this life, but who live and die unhappy, tortured by some evil genius, the victims of unfortunate circumstances. The innocent and naturally light-hearted Eugénie had fallen into the hands and beneath the malicious despotism of a self-made man on leaving the maternal prison. Angélique, whose nature inclined her to deeper sentiments, was thrown into the upper spheres of Parisian social life, with the bridle lying loose upon her neck.

## II.

## A CONFIDENCE BETWEEN SISTERS.

MADAME DE VANDENESSE, Marie-Angélique, who seemed to have broken down under a weight of troubles too heavy for her soul to bear, was lying back on the sofa with bent limbs, and her head tossing restlessly. She had rushed to her sister's house after a brief appearance at the Opera. Flowers were still in her hair, but others were scattered upon the carpet, together with her gloves, her silk pelisse, and muff and hood. Tears were mingling with the pearls on her bosom; her swollen eyes appeared to make strange confidences. In the midst of so much luxury her distress was horrible, and she seemed unable to summon courage to speak.

"Poor darling!" said Madame du Tillet; "what a mistaken idea you have of my marriage if you think that I can help you!"

Hearing this revelation, dragged from her sister's heart by the violence of the storm she herself had raised there, the countess looked with stupefied eyes at the banker's wife; her tears stopped, and her eyes grew fixed.

"Are you in misery as well, my dearest?" she said, in a low voice.

"My griefs will not ease yours."

"But tell them to me, darling; I am not yet too selfish to listen. Are we to suffer together once more, as we did in girlhood?"

"But alas! we suffer apart," said the banker's wife. "You and I live in two worlds at enmity with each other. I go to the Tuileries when you are not there. Our husbands belong to opposite parties. I am the wife of an ambitious banker, — a bad man, my darling; while you have a noble, kind, and generous husband."

"Oh! don't reproach me!" cried the countess. "To understand my position, a woman must have borne the weariness of a vapid and barren life, and have entered suddenly into a paradise of light and love; she must know the happiness of feeling her whole life in that of another; of espousing, as it were, the infinite emotions of a poet's soul; of living a double existence, — going, coming with him in his courses through space, through the world of ambition; suffering with his griefs, rising on the wings of his high pleasures, developing her faculties on some vast stage; and all this while living calm, serene, and cold before an observing world. Ah! dearest, what happiness in having at all hours an enormous interest, which multiplies the fibres of the heart and varies them indefinitely! to feel no longer cold indifference! to find one's very life depending on a thousand trifles! — on a walk where an eye will beam to us from a crowd, on a glance which pales the sun! Ah! what intoxication, dear, to live! to *live* when other women are praying on their knees for emotions that never come to them! Remember, darling, that for this poem of delight there is but a single moment, — youth! In a few years

winter comes, and cold. Ah! if you possessed these living riches of the heart, and were threatened with the loss of them — ”

Madame du Tillet, terrified, had covered her face with her hands during the passionate utterance of this anthem.

“I did not even think of reproaching you, my beloved,” she said at last, seeing her sister’s face bathed in hot tears. “You have cast into my soul, in one moment, more brands than I have tears to quench. Yes, the life I live would justify to my heart a love like that you picture. Let me believe that if we could have seen each other oftener, we should not now be where we are. If you had seen my sufferings, you must have valued your own happiness the more, and you might have strengthened me to resist my tyrant, and so have won a sort of peace. Your misery is an incident which chance may change, but mine is daily and perpetual. To my husband I am a peg on which to hang his luxury, the sign-post of his ambition, a satisfaction to his vanity. He has no real affection for me, and no confidence. Ferdinand is hard and polished as that bit of marble,” she continued, striking the chimney-piece. “He distrusts me. Whatever I may want for myself is refused before I ask it; but as for what flatters his vanity and proclaims his wealth, I have no occasion to express a wish. He decorates my apartments; he spends enormous sums upon my entertainments; my servants, my opera-box, all external matters are maintained with the utmost splendor. His vanity spares no expense; he would trim his children’s swaddling-clothes with lace if he



could, but he would never hear their cries, or guess their needs. Do you understand me? I am covered with diamonds when I go to court; I wear the richest jewels in society, but I have not one farthing I can use. Madame du Tillet, who, they say, is envied, who appears to float in gold, has not a hundred francs she can call her own. If the father cares little for his child, he cares less for its mother. Ah! he has cruelly made me feel that he bought me, and that in marrying me without a *dot* he was wronged. I might perhaps have won him to love me, but there's an outside influence against it, — that of a woman, who is over fifty years of age, the widow of a notary, who rules him. I shall never be free, I know that, so long as he lives. My life is regulated like that of a queen; my meals are served with the utmost formality; at a given hour I must drive to the Bois; I am always accompanied by two footmen in full dress; I am obliged to return at a certain hour. Instead of giving orders, I receive them. At a ball, at the theatre, a servant comes to me and says: 'Madame's carriage is ready,' and I am obliged to go, in the midst, perhaps, of something I enjoy. Ferdinand would be furious if I did not obey the etiquette he prescribes for his wife; he frightens me. In the midst of this hateful opulence, I find myself regretting the past, and thinking that our mother was kind; she left us the nights when we could talk together; at any rate, I was living with a dear being who loved me and suffered with me: whereas here, in this sumptuous house, I live in a desert."

At this terrible confession the countess caught her sister's hand and kissed it, weeping.

"How, then, can I help you?" said Eugénie, in a low voice. "He would be suspicious at once if he surprised us here, and would insist on knowing all that you have been saying to me. I should be forced to tell a lie, which is difficult indeed with so sly and treacherous a man; he would lay traps for me. But enough of my own miseries; let us think of yours. The forty thousand francs you want would be, of course, a mere nothing to Ferdinand, who handles millions with that fat banker, Baron de Nucingen. Sometimes, at dinner, in my presence, they say things to each other which make me shudder. Du Tillet knows my discretion, and they often talk freely before me, being sure of my silence. Well, robbery and murder on the high-road seem to me merciful compared to some of their financial schemes. Nucingen and he no more mind destroying a man than if he were an animal. Often I am told to receive poor dupes whose fate I have heard them talk of the night before, — men who rush into some business where they are certain to lose their all. I am tempted, like Léonardo in the brigand's cave, to cry out, 'Beware!' But if I did, what would become of me? So I keep silence. This splendid house is a cut-throat's den! But Ferdinand and Nucingen will lavish millions for their own caprices. Ferdinand is now buying from the other du Tillet family the site of their old castle; he intends to rebuild it and add a forest with large domains to the estate, and make his son a count; he declares that by the third generation the family will be noble. Nucingen, who is tired of his house in the rue Saint-Lazare, is building a palace. His wife is a friend of

mine — Ah!" she cried, interrupting herself, "she might help us; she is very bold with her husband; her fortune is in her own right. Yes, she could save you."

"Dear heart, I have but a few hours left; let us go to her this evening, now, instantly," said Madame de Vandenesse, throwing herself into Madame du Tillet's arms with a burst of tears.

"I can't go out at eleven o'clock at night," replied her sister.

"My carriage is here."

"What are you two plotting together?" said du Tillet, pushing open the door of the boudoir.

He came in showing a torpid face lighted now by a speciously amiable expression. The carpets had dulled his steps and the preoccupation of the two sisters had kept them from noticing the noise of his carriage-wheels on entering the court-yard. The countess, in whom the habits of social life and the freedom in which her husband left her had developed both wit and shrewdness, — qualities repressed in her sister by marital despotism, which simply continued that of their mother, — saw that Eugénie's terror was on the point of betraying them, and she evaded that danger by a frank answer.

"I thought my sister richer than she is," she replied, looking straight at her brother-in-law. "Women are sometimes embarrassed for money, and do not wish to tell their husbands, like Joséphine with Napoleon. I came here to ask Eugénie to do me a service."

"She can easily do that, madame. Eugénie is very rich," replied du Tillet, with concealed sarcasm.

"Is she?" replied the countess, smiling bitterly.

"How much do you want?" asked du Tillet, who was not sorry to get his sister-in-law into his meshes.

"Ah, monsieur! but I have told you already we do not wish to let our husbands into this affair," said Madame de Vandenesse, cautiously,—aware that if she took his money, she would put herself at the mercy of the man whose portrait Eugénie had fortunately drawn for her not ten minutes earlier. "I will come to-morrow and talk with Eugénie."

"To-morrow?" said the banker. "No; Madame du Tillet dines to-morrow with a future peer of France, the Baron de Nucingen, who is to leave me his place in the Chamber of Deputies."

"Then permit her to join me in my box at the Opera," said the countess, without even glancing at her sister, so much did she fear that Eugénie's candor would betray them.

"She has her own box, madame," said du Tillet, nettled.

"Very good; then I will go to hers," replied the countess.

"It will be the first time you have done us that honor," said du Tillet.

The countess felt the sting of that reproach, and began to laugh.

"Well, never mind; you shall not be made to pay anything this time. Adieu, my darling."

"She is an insolent woman," said du Tillet, picking up the flowers that had fallen on the carpet. "You ought," he said to his wife, "to study Madame de Vandenesse. I'd like to see you before the world as

insolent and overbearing as your sister has just been here. You have a silly, bourgeois air which I detest."

Eugénie raised her eyes to heaven as her only answer.

"*Ah ça*, madame! what have you both been talking of?" said the banker, after a pause, pointing to the flowers. "What has happened to make your sister so anxious all of a sudden to go to your opera-box?"

The poor helot endeavored to escape questioning on the score of sleepiness, and turned to go into her dressing-room to prepare for the night; but du Tillet took her by the arm and brought her back under the full light of the wax-candles which were burning in two silver-gilt sconces between fragrant nosegays. He plunged his light eyes into hers and said, coldly:—

"Your sister came here to borrow forty thousand francs for a man in whom she takes an interest, who'll be locked up within three days in a debtor's prison."

The poor woman was seized with a nervous trembling, which she endeavored to repress.

"You alarm me," she said. "But my sister is far too well brought up, and she loves her husband too much to be interested in any man to that extent."

"Quite the contrary," he said, dryly. "Girls brought up as you were, in the constraints and practice of piety, have a thirst for liberty; they desire happiness, and the happiness they get in marriage is never as fine as that they dreamt of. Such girls make bad wives."

"Speak for me," said poor Eugénie, in a tone of

bitter feeling, "but respect my sister. The Comtesse de Vandenesse is happy; her husband gives her too much freedom not to make her truly attached to him. Besides, if your supposition were true, she would never have told me of such a matter."

"It is true," he said, "and I forbid you to have anything to do with the affair. My interests demand that the man shall go to prison. Remember my orders."

Madame du Tillet left the room.

"She will disobey me, of course, and I shall find out all the facts by watching her," thought du Tillet, when alone in the boudoir. "These poor fools always think they can do battle against us."

He shrugged his shoulders and rejoined his wife, or to speak the truth, his slave.

The confidence made to Madame du Tillet by Madame Félix de Vandenesse is connected with so many points of the latter's history for the last six years, that it would be unintelligible without a succinct account of the principal events of her life.

## III.

## THE HISTORY OF A FORTUNATE WOMAN.

AMONG the remarkable men who owed their destiny to the Restoration, but whom, unfortunately, the restored monarchy kept, with Martignac, aloof from the concerns of government, was Félix de Vandenesse, removed, with several others, to the Chamber of peers during the last days of Charles X. This misfortune, though, as he supposed, temporary, made him think of marriage, towards which he was also led, as so many men are, by a sort of disgust for the emotions of gallantry, those fairy flowers of the soul. There comes a vital moment to most of us when social life appears in all its soberness.

Félix de Vandenesse had been in turn happy and unhappy, oftener unhappy than happy, like men who, at their start in life, have met with Love in its most perfect form. Such privileged beings can never subsequently be satisfied; but, after fully experiencing life, and comparing characters, they attain to a certain contentment, taking refuge in a spirit of general indulgence. No one deceives them, for they delude themselves no longer; but their resignation, their disillusionment is always graceful; they expect what comes, and therefore they suffer less. Félix might still rank among the handsomest and most agreeable men in

Paris. He was originally commended to many women by one of the noblest creatures of our epoch, Madame de Mortsauf, who had died, it was said, out of love and grief for him; but he was specially trained for social life by the handsome and well-known Lady Dudley.

In the eyes of many Parisian women, Félix, a sort of hero of romance, owed much of his success to the evil that was said of him. Madame de Manerville had closed the list of his amorous adventures; and perhaps her dismissal had something to do with his frame of mind. At any rate, without being in any way a Don Juan, he had gathered in the world of love as many disenchantments as he had met with in the world of politics. That ideal of womanhood and of passion, the type of which — perhaps to his sorrow — had lighted and governed his dawn of life, he despaired of ever finding again.

At thirty years of age, Comte Félix determined to put an end to the burden of his various felicities by marriage. On that point his ideas were extremely fixed; he wanted a young girl brought up in the strictest tenets of Catholicism. It was enough for him to know how the Comtesse de Granville had trained her daughters to make him, after he had once resolved on marriage, request the hand of the eldest. He himself had suffered under the despotism of a mother; he still remembered his unhappy childhood too well not to recognize, beneath the reserves of feminine shyness, the state to which such a yoke must have brought the heart of a young girl, whether that heart was soured, embittered, or rebellious, or whether it was still peace-



ful, lovable, and ready to unclothe to noble sentiments. Tyranny produces two opposite effects, the symbols of which exist in two grand figures of ancient slavery, Epictetus and Spartacus, — hatred and evil feelings on the one hand, resignation and tenderness, on the other.

The Comte de Vandenesse recognized himself in Marie-Angélique de Granville. In choosing for his wife an artless, innocent, and pure young girl, this young old man determined to mingle a paternal feeling with the conjugal feeling. He knew his own heart was withered by the world and by politics, and he felt that he was giving in exchange for a dawning life the remains of a worn-out existence. Beside those springtide flowers he was putting the ice of winter; hoary experience with young and innocent ignorance. After soberly judging the position, he took up his conjugal career with ample precaution; indulgence and perfect confidence were the two anchors to which he moored it. Mothers of families ought to seek such men for their daughters. A good mind protects like a divinity; disenchantment is as keen-sighted as a surgeon; experience as foreseeing as a mother. Those three qualities are the cardinal virtues of a safe marriage. All that his past career had taught to Félix de Vandenesse, the observations of a life that was busy, literary, and thoughtful by turns, all his forces, in fact, were now employed in making his wife happy; to that end he applied his mind.

When Marie-Angélique left the maternal purgatory, she rose at once into the conjugal paradise prepared for her by Félix, rue du Rocher, in a house where all

things were redolent of aristocracy, but where the varnish of society did not impede the ease and *laissezaller* which young and loving hearts desire so much. From the start, Marie-Angélique tasted all the sweets of material life to the very utmost. For two years her husband made himself, as it were, her purveyor. He explained to her by degrees, and with great art, the things of life; he initiated her slowly into the mysteries of the highest society; he taught her the genealogies of noble families; he showed her the world; he guided her taste in dress; he trained her to converse; he took her from theatre to theatre, and made her study literature and current history. This education he accomplished with all the care of a lover, father, master, and husband; but he did it soberly and discreetly; he managed both enjoyments and instructions in such a manner as not to destroy the value of her religious ideas. In short, he carried out his enterprise with the wisdom of a great master. At the end of four years, he had the happiness of having formed in the Comtesse de Vandenesse one of the most lovable and remarkable young women of our day.

Marie-Angélique felt for Félix precisely the feelings with which Félix desired to inspire her, — true friendship, sincere gratitude, and a fraternal love, in which was mingled, at certain times, a noble and dignified tenderness, such as tenderness between husband and wife ought to be. She was a mother, and a good mother. Félix had therefore attached himself to his young wife by every bond without any appearance of garroting her, — relying for his happiness on the charms of habit.

None but men trained in the school of life — men who have gone round the circle of disillusionment, political and amorous — are capable of following out a course like this. Félix, however, found in his work the same pleasure that painters, writers, architects take in their creations. He doubly enjoyed both the work and its fruition as he admired his wife, so artless, yet so well-informed, witty, but natural, lovable and chaste, a girl, and yet a mother, perfectly free, though bound by the chains of rightness. The history of all good homes is that of prosperous peoples; it can be written in two lines, and has in it nothing for literature. So, as happiness is only explicable to and by itself, these four years furnish nothing to relate which was not as tender as the soft outlines of eternal cherubs, as insipid, alas! as manna, and about as amusing as the tale of "Astrea."

In 1833, this edifice of happiness, so carefully erected by Félix de Vandenesse, began to crumble, weakened at its base without his knowledge. The heart of a woman of twenty-five is no longer that of a girl of eighteen, any more than the heart of a woman of forty is that of a woman of thirty. There are four ages in the life of woman; each age creates a new woman. Vandenesse knew, no doubt, the law of these transformations (created by our modern manners and morals), but he forgot them in his own case, — just as the best grammarian will forget a rule of grammar in writing a book, or the greatest general on the field under fire, surprised by some unlooked-for change of base, forgets his military tactics. The man who can perpetually bring his thought to bear upon his facts is a

man of genius; but the man of the highest genius does not display genius at all times; if he did, he would be like to God.

After four years of this life, with never a shock to the soul, nor a word that produced the slightest discord in this sweet concert of sentiment, the countess, feeling herself developed like a beautiful plant in a fertile soil, caressed by the sun of a cloudless sky, awoke to a sense of a new self. This crisis of her life, the subject of this Scene, would be incomprehensible without certain explanations, which may extenuate in the eyes of women the wrong-doing of this young countess, a happy wife, a happy mother, who seems, at first sight, inexcusable.

Life results from the action of two opposing principles; when one of them is lacking the being suffers. Vandenesse, by satisfying every need, had suppressed desire, that king of creation, which fills an enormous place in the moral forces. Extreme heat, extreme sorrow, complete happiness, are all despotic principles that reign over spaces devoid of production; they insist on being solitary; they stifle all that is not themselves. Vandenesse was not a woman, and none but women know the art of varying happiness; hence their coquetry, refusals, fears, quarrels, and the all-wise clever foolery with which they put in doubt the things that seemed to be without a cloud the night before. Men may weary by their constancy, but women never. Vandenesse was too thoroughly kind by nature to worry deliberately the woman he loved; on the contrary, he kept her in the bluest and least cloudy heaven of love. The problem of eternal beati-

tude is one of those whose solution is known only to God. Here, below, the sublimest poets have simply harassed their readers when attempting to picture paradise. Dante's reef was that of Vandenesse; all honor to such courage!

Felix's wife began to find monotony in an Eden so well arranged; the perfect happiness which the first woman found in her terrestrial paradise gave her at length a sort of nausea of sweet things, and made the countless wish, like Rivarol reading Florian, for a wolf in the fold. Such, judging by the history of ages, appears to be the meaning of that emblematic serpent to which Eve listened, in all probability, out of ennui. This deduction may seem a little venturesome to Protestants, who take the book of Genesis more seriously than the Jews themselves.

The situation of Madame de Vandenesse can, however, be explained without recourse to Biblical images. She felt in her soul an enormous power that was unemployed. Her happiness gave her no suffering; it rolled along without care or uneasiness; she was not afraid of losing it; each morning it shone upon her, with the same blue sky, the same smile, the same sweet words. That clear, still lake was unruffled by any breeze, even a zephyr; she would fain have seen a ripple on its glassy surface. Her desire had something so infantine about it that it ought to be excused; but society is not more indulgent than the God of Genesis. Madame de Vandenesse, having now become intelligently clever, was aware that such sentiments were not permissible, and she refrained from confiding them to her "dear little husband." Her genuine

simplicity had not invented any other name for him; for one can't call up in cold blood that delightfully exaggerated language which love imparts to its victims in the midst of flames.

Vandenesse, glad of this adorable reserve, kept his wife, by deliberate calculations, in the temperate regions of conjugal affection. He never condescended to seek a reward or even an acknowledgment of the infinite pains which he gave himself; his wife thought his luxury and good taste her natural right, and she felt no gratitude for the fact that her pride and self-love had never suffered. It was thus in everything. Kindness has its mishaps; often it is attributed to temperament; people are seldom willing to recognize it as the secret effort of a noble soul.

About this period of her life, Madame Félix de Vandenesse had attained to a degree of worldly knowledge which enabled her to quit the insignificant rôle of a timid, listening, and observing supernumerary, — a part played, they say, for some time, by Giulia Grisi in the chorus at La Scala. The young countess now felt herself capable of attempting the part of prima-donna, and she did so on several occasions. To the great satisfaction of her husband, she began to mingle in conversations. Intelligent ideas and delicate observations put into her mind by her intercourse with her husband, made her remarked upon, and success emboldened her. Vandenesse, to whom the world admitted that his wife was beautiful, was delighted when the same assurance was given that she was clever and witty. On their return from a ball, concert, or rout where Marie had shone brilliantly,

she would turn to her husband, as she took off her ornaments, and say, with a joyous, self-assured air, —  
“Were you pleased with me this evening?”

The countess excited jealousies; among others that of her husband's sister, Madame de Listomère, who until now had patronized her, thinking that she protected a foil to her own merits. A countess, beautiful, witty and virtuous! — what a prey for the tongues of the world! Félix had broken with too many women, and too many women had broken with him, to leave them indifferent to his marriage. When these women beheld in Madame de Vandenesse a small woman with red hands, and rather awkward manner, saying little, and apparently not thinking much, they thought themselves sufficiently avenged. The disasters of July, 1830, supervened; society was dissolved for two years; the rich evaded the turmoil and left Paris either for foreign travel or for their estates in the country, and none of the salons reopened until 1833. When that time came, the faubourg Saint-Germain still sulked, but it held intercourse with a few houses, regarding them as neutral ground, — among others that of the Austrian ambassador, where the legitimist society and the new social world met together in the persons of their best representatives.

Attached by many ties of the heart and by gratitude to the exiled family, and strong in his personal convictions, Vandenesse did not consider himself obliged to imitate the silly behavior of his party. In times of danger, he had done his duty at the risk of his life; his fidelity had never been compromised, and he determined to take his wife into general soci-

ety without fear of its becoming so. His former mistresses could scarcely recognize the bride they had thought so childish in the elegant, witty, and gentle countess, who now appeared in society with the exquisite manners of the highest female aristocracy. Mesdames d'Espard, de Manerville, and Lady Dudley, with others less known, felt the serpent waking up in the depths of their hearts; they heard the low hissings of angry pride; they were jealous of Félix's happiness, and would gladly have given their prettiest jewel to do him some harm; but instead of being hostile to the countess, these kind, ill-natured women surrounded her, showed her the utmost friendship, and praised her to men. Sufficiently aware of their intentions, Félix watched their relations with Marie, and warned her to distrust them. They all suspected the uneasiness of the count at their intimacy with his wife, and they redoubled their attentions and flatteries, so that they gave her an enormous vogue in society, to the great displeasure of her sister-in-law, the Marquise de Listomère, who could not understand it. The Comtesse Félix de Vandenesse was cited as the most charming and the cleverest woman in Paris. Marie's other sister-in-law, the Marquise Charles de Vandenesse, was consumed with vexation at the confusion of names and the comparisons it sometimes brought about. Though the marquise was a handsome and clever woman, her rivals took delight in comparing her with her sister-in-law, with all the more point because the countess was a dozen years younger. These women knew very well what bitterness Marie's social vogue would bring into her intercourse with both



of her sisters-in-law, who, in fact, became cold and disobliging in proportion to her triumph in society. She was thus surrounded by dangerous relations and intimate enemies.

Every one knows that French literature at that particular period was endeavoring to defend itself against an apathetic indifference (the result of the political drama) by producing works more or less Byronian, in which the only topics really discussed were conjugal delinquencies. Infringements of the marriage tie formed the staple of reviews, books, and dramas. This eternal subject grew more and more the fashion. The lover, that nightmare of husbands, was everywhere, except perhaps in homes, where, in point of fact, under the bourgeois *régime*, he was less seen than formerly. It is not when every one rushes to their window and cries "Thief!" and lights the streets, that robbers abound. It is true that during those years so fruitful of turmoil — urban, political, and moral — a few matrimonial catastrophes took place; but these were exceptional, and less observed than they would have been under the Restoration. Nevertheless, women talked a great deal together about books and the stage, then the two chief forms of poesy. The lover thus became one of their leading topics, — a being rare in point of fact and much desired. The few affairs which were known gave rise to discussions, and these discussions were, as usually happens, carried on by immaculate women.

A fact worthy of remark is the aversion shown to such conversations by women who are enjoying some illicit happiness; they maintain before the eyes of the

world a reserved, prudish, and even timid countenance; they seem to ask silence on the subject, or some condonation of their pleasure from society. When, on the contrary, a woman talks freely of such catastrophes, and seems to take pleasure in doing so, allowing herself to explain the emotions that justify the guilty parties, we may be sure that she herself is at the crossways of indecision, and does not know what road she might take.

During this winter, the Comtesse de Vandenesse heard the great voice of the social world roaring in her ears, and the wind of its stormy gusts blew round her. Her pretended friends, who maintained their reputations at the height of their rank and their positions, often produced in her presence the seductive idea of the lover; they cast into her soul certain ardent talk of love, the *mot d'énigme* which life propounds to woman, the grand passion, as Madame de Staël called it, — preaching by example. When the countess asked naïvely, in a small and select circle of these friends, what difference there was between a lover and a husband, all those who wished evil to Félix took care to reply in a way to pique her curiosity, or fire her imagination, or touch her heart, or interest her mind.

“Oh! my dear, we vegetate with a husband, but we live with a lover,” said her sister-in-law, the marquise.

“Marriage, my dear, is our purgatory; love is paradise,” said Lady Dudley.

“Don’t believe her,” cried Mademoiselle des Touches; “it is hell.”

"But a hell we like," remarked Madame de Rochefide. "There is often more pleasure in suffering than in happiness; look at the martyrs!"

"With a husband, my dear innocent, we live, as it were, in our own life; but to love, is to live in the life of another," said the Marquise d'Espard.

"A lover is forbidden fruit, and that to me, says all!" cried the pretty Moïna de Saint-Héren, laughing.

When she was not at some diplomatic rout, or at a ball given by rich foreigners, like Lady Dudley or the Princesse Galathionne, the Comtesse de Vandenesse might be seen, after the Opera, at the houses of Madame d'Espard, the Marquise de Listomère, Mademoiselle des Touches, the Comtesse de Montcornet, or the Vicomtesse de Grandlieu, the only aristocratic houses then open; and never did she leave any one of them without some evil seed of the world being sown in her heart. She heard talk of completing her life, — a saying much in fashion in those days; of being comprehended, — another word to which women gave strange meanings. She often returned home uneasy, excited, curious, and thoughtful. She began to find something less, she hardly knew what, in her life; but she did not yet go so far as to think it lonely.

## IV.

## A CELEBRATED MAN.

THE most amusing society, but also the most mixed, which Madame Félix de Vandenesse frequented, was that of the Comtesse de Montcornet, a charming little woman, who received illustrious artists, leading financial personages, distinguished writers; but only after subjecting them to so rigid an examination that the most exclusive aristocrat had nothing to fear in coming in contact with this second-class society. The loftiest pretensions were there respected.

During the winter of 1833, when society rallied after the revolution of July, some salons, notably those of Mesdames d'Espard and de Listomère, Mademoiselle des Touches, and the Duchesse de Grandlieu, had selected certain of the celebrities in art, science, literature, and politics, and received them. Society can lose nothing of its rights, and it must be amused. At a concert given by Madame de Montcornet toward the close of the winter of 1833, a man of rising fame in literature and politics appeared in her salon, brought there by one of the wittiest, but also one of the laziest writers of that epoch, Émile Blondet, celebrated behind closed doors, highly praised by journalists, but unknown beyond the barriers. Blondet himself was well aware of this; he indulged in no illusions, and,

among his other witty and contemptuous sayings, he was wont to remark that fame is a poison good to take in little doses.

From the moment when the man we speak of, Raoul Nathan, after a long struggle, forced his way to the public gaze, he had put to profit the sudden infatuation for form manifested by those elegant descendants of the middle ages, jestingly called Young France. He assumed the singularities of a man of genius and enrolled himself among those adorers of art, whose intentions, let us say, were excellent; for surely nothing could be more ridiculous than the costume of Frenchmen in the nineteenth century, and nothing more courageous than an attempt to reform it. Raoul, let us do him this justice, presents in his person something fine, fantastic, and extraordinary, which needs a frame. His enemies, or his friends, they are about the same thing, agree that nothing could harmonize better with his mind than his outward form.

Raoul Nathan would, perhaps, be more singular if left to his natural self than he is with his various accompaniments. His worn and haggard face gives him an appearance of having fought with angels or devils; it bears some resemblance to that the German painters give to the dead Christ; countless signs of a constant struggle between failing human nature and the powers on high appear in it. But the lines in his hollow cheeks, the projections of his crooked, furrowed skull, the caverns around his eyes and behind his temples, show nothing weakly in his constitution. His hard membranes, his visible bones are the signs of remarkable solidity; and though his skin,

discolored by excesses, clings to those bones as if dried there by inward fires, it nevertheless covers a most powerful structure. He is thin and tall. His long hair, always in disorder, is worn so for effect. This ill-combed, ill-made Byron has heron legs and stiffened knee-joints, an exaggerated stoop, hands with knotty muscles, firm as a crab's claws, and long, thin, wiry fingers. Raoul's eyes are Napoleonic, blue eyes, which pierce to the soul; his nose is crooked and very shrewd; his mouth charming, embellished with the whitest teeth that any woman could desire. There is fire and movement in the head, and genius on that brow. Raoul belongs to the small number of men who strike your mind as you pass them, and who, in a salon, make a luminous spot to which all eyes are attracted.

He makes himself remarked also by his *négligé*, if we may borrow from Molière the word which Éliante uses to express the want of personal neatness. His clothes always seem to have been twisted, frayed, and crumpled intentionally, in order to harmonize with his physiognomy. He keeps one of his hands habitually in the bosom of his waistcoat in the pose which Girodet's portrait of Monsieur de Chateaubriand has rendered famous; but less to imitate that great man (for he does not wish to resemble any one) than to rumple the over-smooth front of his shirt. His cravat is no sooner put on than it is twisted by the convulsive motions of his head, which are quick and abrupt, like those of a thoroughbred horse impatient of harness, and constantly tossing up its head to rid itself of bit and bridle. His long and pointed beard is

neither combed, nor perfumed, nor brushed, nor trimmed, like those of the elegant young men of society; he lets it alone, to grow as it will. His hair, getting between the collar of his coat and his cravat, lies luxuriantly on his shoulders, and greases whatever spot it touches. His wiry, bony hands ignore a nail-brush and the luxury of lemon. Some of his *co-feuilletonists* declare that purifying waters seldom touch their calcined skin.

In short, the terrible Raoul is grotesque. His movements are jerky, as if produced by imperfect machinery; his gait rejects all idea of order, and proceeds by spasmodic zig-zags and sudden stoppages, which knock him violently against peaceable citizens on the streets and boulevards of Paris. His conversation, full of caustic humor, of bitter satire, follows the gait of his body; suddenly it abandons its tone of vengeance and turns sweet, poetic, consoling, gentle, without apparent reason; he falls into inexplicable silences, or turns somersets of wit, which at times are somewhat wearying. In society, he is boldly awkward, and exhibits a contempt for conventions and a critical air about things respected which makes him unpleasant to narrow minds, and also to those who strive to preserve the doctrines of old-fashioned, gentlemanly politeness; but for all that there is a sort of lawless originality about him which women do not dislike. Besides, to them, he is often most amiably courteous; he seems to take pleasure in making them forget his personal singularities, and thus obtains a victory over antipathies which flatters either his vanity, his self-love, or his pride.

"Why do you present yourself like that?" said the Marquise de Vandenesse one day.

"Pearls live in oyster-shells," he answered, conceitedly.

To another who asked him somewhat the same question, he replied, —

"If I were charming to all the world, how could I seem better still to the one woman I wish to please?"

Raoul Nathan imports this same natural disorder (which he uses as a banner) into his intellectual life; and the attribute is not misleading. His talent is very much that of the poor girls who go about in bourgeois families to work by the day. He was first a critic, and a great critic; but he felt himself cheated in that vocation. His articles were equal to books, he said. The profits of theatrical work then allured him; but, incapable of the slow and steady application required for stage arrangement, he was forced to associate with himself a vaudevillist, du Bruel, who took his ideas, worked them over, and reduced them into those productive little pieces, full of wit, which are written expressly for actors and actresses. Between them, they had invented Florine, an actress now in vogue.

Humiliated by this association, which was that of the Siamese twins, Nathan had produced alone, at the Théâtre-Français, a serious drama, which fell with all the honors of war amid salvos of thundering articles. In his youth he had once before appeared at the great and noble Théâtre-Français in a splendid romantic play of the style of "Pinto," — a period when the classic reigned supreme. The Odéon was so



violently agitated for three nights that the play was forbidden by the censor. This second piece was considered by many a masterpiece, and won him more real reputation than all his productive little pieces done with collaborators, — but only among a class to whom little attention is paid, that of connoisseurs and persons of true taste.

“Make another failure like that,” said Émile Blondet, “and you’ll be immortal.”

But instead of continuing in that difficult path, Nathan had fallen, out of sheer necessity, into the powder and patches of eighteenth-century vaudeville, costume plays, and the reproduction, scenically, of successful novels.

Nevertheless, he passed for a great mind which had not said its last word: He had, moreover, attempted permanent literature, having published three novels, not to speak of several others which he kept in press like fish in a tank. One of these three books, the first (like that of many writers who can only make one real trip into literature), had obtained a very brilliant success. This work, imprudently placed in the front rank, this really artistic work he was never weary of calling the finest book of the period, the novel of the century.

Raoul complained bitterly of the exigencies of art. He was one of those who contributed most to bring all created work, pictures, statues, books, building under the single standard of ART. He had begun his career by committing a volume of verse, which won him a place in the pleiades of living poets; among these verses was a nebulous poem that was greatly admired.

Forced by want of means to keep on producing, he went from the theatre to the press, and from the press to the theatre, dissipating and scattering his talent, but believing always in his vein. His fame was therefore not unpublished like that of so many great minds in extremity, who sustain themselves only by the thought of work to be done.

Nathan resembled a man of genius; and had he marched to the scaffold, as he sometimes wished he could have done, he might have struck his brow with the famous action of André Chenier. Seized with political ambition on seeing the rise to power of a dozen authors, professors, metaphysicians, and historians, who incrustated themselves, so to speak, upon the machine during the turmoils of 1830 and 1833, he regretted that he had not spent his time on political instead of literary articles. He thought himself superior to all those parvenus, whose success inspired him with consuming jealousy. He belonged to the class of minds ambitious of everything, capable of all things, from whom success is, as it were, stolen; who go their way dashing at a hundred luminous points, and settling upon none, exhausting at last the good-will of others.

At this particular time he was going from Saint-Simonism into republicanism, to return, very likely, to ministerialism. He looked for a bone to gnaw in all corners, searching for a safe place where he could bark secure from kicks and make himself feared. But he had the mortification of finding he was held to be of no account by de Marsay, then at the head of the government, who had no consideration whatever for

authors, among whom he did not find what Richelieu called a consecutive mind, or more correctly, continuity of ideas; he counted as any minister would have done on the constant embarrassment of Raoul's business affairs. Sooner or later, necessity would bring him to accept conditions instead of imposing them.

The real, but carefully concealed character of Raoul Nathan is of a piece with his public career. He is a comedian in good faith, selfish as if the State were himself, and a very clever orator. No one knows better how to play off sentiments, glory in false grandeurs, deck himself with moral beauty, do honor to his nature in language, and pose like *Alceste* while behaving like *Philinte*. His egotism trots along protected by this cardboard armor, and often almost reaches the end he seeks. Lazy to a superlative degree, he does nothing, however, until he is prodded by the bayonets of need. He is incapable of continued labor applied to the creation of a work; but, in a paroxysm of rage caused by wounded vanity, or in a crisis brought on by creditors, he leaps the Eurotas and attains to some great triumph of his intellect. After which, weary, and surprised at having created anything, he drops back into the marasmus of Parisian dissipation; wants become formidable; he has no strength to face them; and then he comes down from his pedestal and compromises.

Influenced by a false idea of his grandeur and of his future, — the measure of which he reckons on the noble success of one of his former comrades, one of the few great talents brought to light by the revolution of July, — he allows himself, in order to get out of his

embarrassments, certain laxities of principle with persons who are friendly to him, — laxities which never come to the surface, but are buried in private life, where no one ever mentions or complains of them. The shallowness of his heart, the impurity of his hand, which clasps that of all vices, all evils, all treacheries, all opinions, have made him as inviolable as a constitutional king. Venial sins, which excite a hue and cry against a man of high character, are thought nothing of in him; the world hastens to excuse them. Men who might otherwise be inclined to despise him shake hands with him, fearing that the day may come when they will need him. He has, in fact, so many friends that he wishes for enemies.

Judged from a literary point of view, Nathan lacks style and cultivation. Like most young men, ambitious of literary fame, he disgorges to-day what he acquired yesterday. He has neither the time nor the patience to write carefully; he does not observe, but he listens. Incapable of constructing a vigorously framed plot, he sometimes makes up for it by the impetuous ardor of his drawing. He “does passion,” to use a term of the literary argot; but instead of awaking ideas, his heroes are simply enlarged individualities, who excite only fugitive sympathies; they are not connected with any of the great interests of life, and consequently they represent nothing. Nevertheless, Nathan maintains his ground by the quickness of his mind, by those lucky hits which billiard-players call a “good stroke.” He is the cleverest shot at ideas on the fly in all Paris. His fecundity is not his own, but that of his epoch; he lives on

chance events, and to control them he distorts their meaning. In short, he is not *true*; his presentation is false; in him, as Comte Félix said, is the born juggler. Moreover, his pen gets its ink in the boudoir of an actress.

Raoul Nathan is a fair type of the Parisian literary youth of the day, with its false grandeurs and its real misery. He represents that youth by his incomplete beauties and his headlong falls, by the turbulent torrent of his existence, with its sudden reverses and its unhopèd-for triumphs. He is truly the child of a century consumed with envy, — a century with a thousand rivalries lurking under many a system, which nourish to their own profit that hydra of anarchy which wants wealth without toil, fame without talent, success without effort, but whose vices force it, after much rebellion and many skirmishes, to accept the budget under the powers that be. When so many young ambitions, starting on foot, give one another rendezvous at the same point, there is always contention of wills, extreme wretchedness, bitter struggles. In this dreadful battle, selfishness, the most overbearing or the most adroit selfishness, gains the victory; and it is envied and applauded in spite, as Molière said, of outcries, and we all know it.

When, in his capacity as enemy to the new dynasty, Raoul was introduced in the salon of Madame de Montcornet, his apparent grandeurs were flourishing. He was accepted as the political critic of the de Marsays, the Rastignacs, and the Roche-Hugons, who had stepped into power. Émile Blondet, the victim of incurable hesitation and of his innate repugnance to

any action that concerned only himself, continued his trade of scoffer, took sides with no one, and kept well with all. He was friendly with Raoul, friendly with Rastignac, friendly with Montcornet.

"You are a political triangle," said de Marsay, laughing, when they met at the Opera. "That geometric form, my dear fellow, belongs only to the Deity, who has nothing to do; ambitious men ought to follow curved lines, the shortest road in politics."

Seen from a distance, Raoul Nathan was a very fine meteor. Fashion accepted his ways and his appearance. His borrowed republicanism gave him, for the time being, that Jansenist harshness assumed by the defenders of the popular cause, while they inwardly scoff at it, — a quality not without charm in the eyes of women. Women like to perform prodigies, break rocks, and soften natures which seem of iron.

Raoul's moral costume was therefore in keeping with his clothes. He was fitted to be what he became to the Eve who was bored in her paradise in the rue du Rocher, — the fascinating serpent, the fine talker with magnetic eyes and harmonious motions who tempted the first woman. No sooner had the Comtesse Marie laid eyes on Raoul than she felt an inward emotion, the violence of which caused her a species of terror. The glance of that fraudulent great man exercised a physical influence upon her, which quivered in her very heart, and troubled it. But the trouble was pleasure. The purple mantle which celebrity had draped for a moment round Nathan's shoulders dazzled the ingenuous young woman. When tea was served, she rose from her seat among a knot of talking women,

where she had been striving to see and hear that extraordinary being. Her silence and absorption were noticed by her false friends.

The countess approached the divan in the centre of the room, where Raoul was perorating. She stood there with her arm in that of Madame Octave de Câmp, an excellent woman, who kept the secret of the involuntary trembling by which these violent emotions betrayed themselves. Though the eyes of a captivated woman are apt to shed wonderful sweetness, Raoul was too occupied at that moment in letting off fireworks, too absorbed in his epigrams going up like rockets (in the midst of which were flaming portraits drawn in lines of fire) to notice the naïve admiration of one little Eve concealed in a group of women. Marie's curiosity — like that which would undoubtedly precipitate all Paris into the Jardin des Plantes to see a unicorn, if such an animal could be found in those mountains of the moon, still virgin of the tread of Europeans — intoxicates a secondary mind as much as it saddens great ones; but Raoul was enchanted by it; although he was then too anxious to secure all women to care very much for one alone.

"Take care, my dear," said Marie's kind and gracious companion in her ear, "and go home."

The countess looked at her husband to ask for his arm with one of those glances which husbands do not always understand. Félix did so, and took her home.

"My dear friend," said Madame d'Espard in Raoul's ear, "you are a lucky fellow. You have made more than one conquest to-night, and among them that of the charming woman who has just left us so abruptly."

"Do you know what the Marquise d'Espard meant by that?" said Raoul to Rastignac, when they happened to be comparatively alone between one and two o'clock in the morning.

"I am told that the Comtesse de Vandenesse has taken a violent fancy to you. You are not to be pitied!" said Rastignac.

"I did not see her," said Raoul.

"Oh! but you will see her, you scamp!" cried Émile Blondet, who was standing by. "Lady Dudley is going to ask you to her grand ball, that you may meet the pretty countess."

Raoul and Blondet went off with Rastignac, who offered them his carriage. All three laughed at the combination of an eclectic under-secretary of State, a ferocious republican, and a political atheist.

"Suppose we sup at the expense of the present order of things?" said Blondet, who would fain recall suppers to fashion.

Rastignac took them to Véry's, sent away his carriage, and all three sat down to table to analyze society with Rabelaisian laughs. During the supper, Rastignac and Blondet advised their provisional enemy not to neglect such a capital chance of advancement as the one now offered to him. The two *roués* gave him, in fine satirical style, the history of Madame Félix de Vandenesse; they drove the scalpel of epigram and the sharp points of much good wit into that innocent girlhood and happy marriage. Blondet congratulated Raoul on encountering a woman guilty of nothing worse so far than horrible drawings in red chalk, attenuated water-colors, slippers embroidered for a



husband, sonatas executed with the best intentions, — a girl tied to her mother's apron-strings till she was eighteen, trussed for religious practices, seasoned by Vandenesse, and cooked to a point by marriage. At the third bottle of champagne, Raoul unbosomed himself as he had never done before in his life.

"My friends," he said, "you know my relations with Florine; you also know my life, and you will not be surprised to hear me say that I am absolutely ignorant of what a countess's love may be like. I have often felt mortified that I, a poet, could not give myself a Beatrice, a Laura, except in poetry. A pure and noble woman is like an unstained conscience, — she represents us to ourselves under a noble form. Elsewhere we may soil ourselves, but with her we are always proud, lofty, and immaculate. Elsewhere we lead ill-regulated lives; with her we breathe the calm, the freshness, the verdure of an oasis —"

"Go on, go on, my dear fellow!" cried Rastignac; "twang that fourth string with the prayer in 'Moses' like Paganini."

Raoul remained silent, with fixed eyes, apparently musing.

"This wretched ministerial apprentice does not understand me," he said, after a moment's silence.

So, while the poor Eve in the rue du Rocher went to bed in the sheets of shame, frightened at the pleasure with which she had listened to that sham great poet, these three bold minds were trampling with jests over the tender flowers of her dawning love. Ah! if women only knew the cynical tone that such men, so humble, so fawning in their presence, take behind

their backs! how they sneer at what they say they adore! Fresh, pure, gracious being, how the scoffing jester disrobes and analyzes her! but, even so, the more she loses veils, the more her beauty shines.

Marie was at this moment comparing Raoul and Félix, without imagining the danger there might be for her in such comparisons. Nothing could present a greater contrast than the disorderly, vigorous Raoul to Félix de Vandenesse, who cared for his person like a dainty woman, wore well-fitting clothes, had a charming *desinvoltura*, and was a votary of English nicety, to which, in earlier days, Lady Dudley had trained him. Marie, as a good and pious woman, soon forbade herself even to think of Raoul, and considered that she was a monster of ingratitude for making the comparison.

"What do you think of Raoul Nathan?" she asked her husband the next day at breakfast.

"He is something of a charlatan," replied Félix; "one of those volcanoes who are easily calmed down with a little gold-dust. Madame de Montcornet makes a mistake in admitting him."

This answer annoyed Marie, all the more because Félix supported his opinion with certain facts, relating what he knew of Raoul Nathan's life, — a precarious existence mixed up with a popular actress.

"If the man has genius," he said in conclusion, "he certainly has neither the constancy nor the patience which sanctifies it, and makes it a thing divine. He endeavors to impose on the world by placing himself on a level which he does nothing to maintain. True talent, pains-taking and honorable

talent does not act thus. Men who possess such talent follow their path courageously; they accept its pains and penalties, and don't cover them with tinsel."

A woman's thought is endowed with incredible elasticity. When she receives a knockdown blow, she bends, seems crushed, and then renews her natural shape in a given time.

"Félix is no doubt right," thought she.

But three days later she was once more thinking of the serpent, recalled to him by that singular emotion, painful and yet sweet, which the first sight of Raoul had given her. The count and countess went to Lady Dudley's grand ball, where, by the bye, de Marsay appeared in society for the last time. He died about two months later, leaving the reputation of a great statesman, because, as Blondet remarked, he was incomprehensible.

Vandenesse and his wife again met Raoul Nathan at this ball, which was remarkable for the meeting of several personages of the political drama, who were not a little astonished to find themselves together. It was one of the first solemnities of the great world. The salons presented a magnificent spectacle to the eye, — flowers, diamonds, and brilliant head-dresses; all jewel-boxes emptied; all resources of the toilet put under contribution. The ball-room might be compared to one of those choice conservatories where rich horticulturists collect the most superb rarities, — same brilliancy, same delicacy of texture. On all sides white or tinted gauzes like the wings of the airiest dragon-fly, crêpes, laces, blondes, and tulles, varied as the fantasies of entomological nature; den-

telled, waved, and scalloped; spider's webs of gold and silver; mists of silk embroidered by fairy fingers; plumes colored by the fire of the tropics drooping from haughty heads; pearls twined in braided hair; shot or ribbed or brocaded silks, as though the genius of arabesque had presided over French manufactures, — all this luxury was in harmony with the beauties collected there as if to realize a "Keepsake." The eye received an impression of the whitest shoulders, some amber-tinted, others so polished as to seem colandered, some dewy, some plump and satiny, as though Rubens had prepared their flesh; in short, all shades known to man in white. Here were eyes sparkling like onyx or turquoise fringed with dark lashes; faces of varied outline presenting the most graceful types of many lands; foreheads noble and majestic, or softly rounded, as if thought ruled, or flat, as if resistant will reigned there unconquered; beautiful bosoms swelling, as George IV. admired them, or widely parted after the fashion of the eighteenth century, or pressed together, as Louis XV. required; some shown boldly, without veils, others covered by those charming pleated chemisettes which Raffaele painted. The prettiest feet pointed for the dance, the slimmest waists encircled in the waltz, stimulated the gaze of the most indifferent person present. The murmur of sweet voices, the rustle of gowns, the cadence of the dance, the whirl of the waltz harmoniously accompanied the music. A fairy's wand seemed to have commanded this dazzling revelry, this melody of perfumes, these iridescent lights glittering from crystal chandeliers or sparkling in candelabra. This assemblage of the prettiest

women in their prettiest dresses stood out upon a gloomy background of men in black coats, among whom the eye remarked the elegant, delicate, and correctly drawn profile of nobles, the ruddy beards and grave faces of Englishmen, and the more gracious faces of the French aristocracy. All the orders of Europe glittered on the breasts or hung from the necks of these men.

Examining this society carefully, it was seen to present not only the brilliant tones and colors of outward adornment, but to have a soul, — it lived, it felt, it thought. Hidden passion gave it a physiognomy; mischievous or malignant looks were exchanged; fair and giddy girls betrayed desires; jealous women told each other scandals behind their fans, or paid exaggerated compliments. Society, anointed, curled, and perfumed, gave itself up to social gayety which went to the brain like a heady liquor. It seemed as if from all foreheads, as well as from all hearts, ideas and sentiments were exhaling, which presently condensed and reacted in a volume on the coldest persons present, and excited them. At the most animated moment of this intoxicating party, in a corner of a gilded salon where certain bankers, ambassadors, and the immoral old English earl, Lord Dudley, were playing cards, Madame Félix de Vandenesse was irresistibly drawn to converse with Raoul Nathan. Possibly she yielded to that ball-intoxication which sometimes wrings avowals from the most discreet.

At sight of such a *fête*, and the splendors of a world in which he had never before appeared, Nathan was stirred to the soul by fresh ambition. Seeing Rasti-

gnac, whose younger brother had just been made bishop at twenty-seven years of age, and whose brother-in-law, Martial de la Roche-Hugon, was a minister, and who himself was under-secretary of State, and about to marry, rumor said, the only daughter of the Baron de Nucingen, — a girl with an illimitable *dot*; seeing, moreover, in the diplomatic body an obscure writer whom he had formerly known translating articles in foreign journals for a newspaper turned dynastic since 1830, also professors now made peers of France, — he felt with anguish that he was left behind on a bad road by advocating the overthrow of this new aristocracy of lucky talent, of cleverness crowned by success, and of real merit. Even Blondet, so unfortunate, so used by others in journalism, but so welcomed here, who could, if he liked, enter a career of public service through the influence of Madame de Montcornet, seemed to Nathan's eyes a striking example of the power of social relations. Secretly, in his heart, he resolved to play the game of political opinions, like de Marsay, Rastignac, Blondet, Talleyrand, the leader of this set of men; to rely on facts only, turn them to his own profit, regard his system as a weapon, and not interfere with a society so well constituted, so shrewd, so natural.

"My future," he thought, "will depend on the influence of some woman belonging to this class of society."

With this thought in his mind, conceived by the flame of a frenzied desire, he fell upon the Comtesse de Vandenesse like a hawk on its prey. That charming young woman in her head-dress of marabouts, which

produced the delightful *flou* of the paintings of Lawrence and harmonized well with her gentle nature, was penetrated through and through by the foaming vigor of this poet wild with ambition. Lady Dudley, whom nothing escaped, aided this *tête-à-tête* by throwing the Comte de Vandenesse with Madame de Manerville. Strong in her former ascendancy over him, Natalie de Manerville amused herself by leading Félix into the mazes of a quarrel of witty teasing, blushing half-confidences, regrets coyly flung like flowers at his feet, recriminations in which she excused herself for the sole purpose of being put in the wrong.

These former lovers were speaking to each other for the first time since their rupture; and while her husband's former love was stirring the embers to see if a spark were yet alive, Madame Félix de Vandenesse was undergoing those violent palpitations which a woman feels at the certainty of doing wrong, and stepping on forbidden ground, — emotions that are not without charm, and which awaken various dormant faculties. Women are fond of using Bluebeard's bloody key, that fine mythological idea for which we are indebted to Perrault.

The dramatist — who knew his Shakespeare — displayed his wretchedness, related his struggle with men and things, made his hearer aware of his baseless grandeur, his unrecognized political genius, his life without noble affections. Without saying a single definite word, he contrived to suggest to this charming woman that she should play the noble part of Rebecca in Ivanhoe, and love and protect him. It was all, of course, in the ethereal regions of sentiment. Forget-

me-nots are not more blue, lilies not more white than the images, thoughts, and radiantly illumined brow of this accomplished artist, who was likely to send his conversation to a publisher. He played his part of reptile to this poor Eve so cleverly, he made the fatal bloom of the apple so dazzling to her eyes, that Marie left the ball-room filled with that species of remorse which resembles hope, flattered in all her vanities, stirred to every corner of her heart, caught by her own virtues, allured by her native pity for misfortune.

Perhaps Madame de Manerville had taken Vandenesse into the salon where his wife was talking with Nathan; perhaps he had come there himself to fetch Marie, and take her home; perhaps his conversation with his former flame had awakened slumbering griefs; certain it is that when his wife took his arm to leave the ball-room, she saw that his face was sad and his look serious. The countess wondered if he was displeased with her. No sooner were they seated in the carriage than she turned to Félix and said, with a mischievous smile, —

“Did not I see you talking half the evening with Madame de Manerville?”

Félix was not out of the tangled paths into which his wife had led him by this charming little quarrel, when the carriage turned into their court-yard. This was Marie’s first artifice dictated by her new emotion; and she even took pleasure in triumphing over a man who, until then, had seemed to her so superior.



## V.

## FLORINE.

BETWEEN the rue Basse-du-Rempart and the rue Neuve-des-Mathurins, Raoul had, on the third floor of an ugly and narrow house, in the Passage Sandrié, a poor enough lodging, cold and bare, where he lived ostensibly for the general public, for literary neophytes, and for his creditors, duns, and other annoying persons whom he kept on the threshold of private life. His real home, his fine existence, his presentation of himself before his friends, was in the house of Mademoiselle Florine, a second-class comedy actress, where, for ten years, the said friends, journalists, certain authors, and writers in general disported themselves in the society of equally illustrious actresses. For ten years Raoul had attached himself so closely to this woman that he passed more than half of his life with her; he took all his meals at her house unless he had some friend to invite, or an invitation to dinner elsewhere.

To consummate corruption, Florine added a lively wit, which intercourse with artists had developed and practice sharpened day by day. Wit is thought to be a quality rare in comedians. It is so natural to suppose that persons who spend their lives in showing things on the outside have nothing within. But if we

reflect on the small number of actors and actresses who live in each century, and also on how many dramatic authors and fascinating women this population has supplied relatively to its numbers, it is allowable to refute that opinion, which rests, and apparently will rest forever, on a criticism made against dramatic artists, — namely, that their personal sentiments are destroyed by the plastic presentation of passions; whereas, in fact, they put into their art only their gifts of mind, memory, and imagination. Great artists are beings who, to quote Napoleon, can cut off at will the connection which Nature has put between the senses and thought. Molière and Talma, in their old age, were more in love than ordinary men in all their lives.

Accustomed to listen to journalists, who guess at most things, putting two and two together, to writers, who foresee and tell all that they see; accustomed also to the ways of certain political personages, who watched one another in her house, and profited by all admissions, Florine presented in her own person a mixture of devil and angel, which made her peculiarly fitted to receive these *roués*. They delighted in her cool self-possession; her anomalies of mind and heart entertained them prodigiously. Her house, enriched by gallant tributes, displayed the exaggerated magnificence of women who, caring little about the cost of things, care only for the things themselves, and give them the value of their own caprices,—women who will break a fan or a smelling-bottle fit for queens in a moment of passion, and scream with rage if a servant breaks a ten-franc saucer from which their poodle drinks.

Florine's dining-room, filled with her most distinguished offerings, will give a fair idea of this pell-mell of regal and fantastic luxury. Throughout, even on the ceilings, it was panelled in oak, picked out, here and there, by dead-gold lines. These panels were framed in relief with figures of children playing with fantastic animals, among which the light danced and floated, touching here a sketch by Bixiou, that maker of caricatures, there the cast of an angel holding a vessel of holy water (presented by François Souchet), farther on a coquettish painting of Joseph Bridau, a gloomy picture of a Spanish alchemist by Hippolyte Schinner, an autograph of Lord Byron to Lady Caroline Lamb, framed in carved ebony, while, hanging opposite as a species of pendant, was a letter from Napoleon to Josephine. All these things were placed about without the slightest symmetry, but with almost imperceptible art. On the chimney-piece, of exquisitely carved oak, there was nothing except a strange, evidently Florentine, ivory statuette attributed to Michael Angelo, representing Pan discovering a woman under the skin of a young shepherd, the original of which is in the royal palace of Vienna. On either side were candelabra of Renaissance design. A clock, by Boule, on a tortoise-shell stand, inlaid with brass, sparkled in the centre of one panel between two statuettes, undoubtedly obtained from the demolition of some abbey. In the corners of the room, on pedestals, were lamps of royal magnificence, as to which a manufacturer had made strong remonstrance against adapting his lamps to Japanese vases. On a marvellous sideboard was displayed a service of silver

plate, the gift of an English lord, also porcelains in high relief; in short, the luxury of an actress who has no other property than her furniture.

The bedroom, all in violet, was a dream that Florine had indulged from her *début*, the chief features of which were curtains of violet velvet lined with white silk, and looped over tulle; a ceiling of white cashmere with violet satin rays, an ermine carpet beside the bed; in the bed, the curtains of which resembled a lily turned upside down, was a lantern by which to read the newspaper plaudits or criticisms before they appeared in the morning. A yellow salon, its effect heightened by trimmings of the color of Florentine bronze, was in harmony with the rest of these magnificences, a further description of which would make our pages resemble the posters of an auction sale. To find comparisons for all these fine things, it would be necessary to go to a certain house that was almost next door, belonging to a Rothschild.

Sophie Grignault, surnamed Florine by a form of baptism quite common in theatres, had made her first appearances, in spite of her beauty, on very inferior boards. Her success and her money she owed to Raoul Nathan. This association of their two fates, usual enough in the dramatic and literary world, did no harm to Raoul, who kept up the outward conventions of a man of the world. Moreover, Florine's actual means were precarious; her revenues came from her salary and her leaves of absence, and barely sufficed for her dress and her household expenses. Nathan gave her certain perquisites which he managed to levy as critic on several of the new enterprises of in-

dustrial art. But although he was always gallant and protecting towards her, that protection had nothing regular or solid about it.

This uncertainty, and this life on a bough, as it were, did not alarm Florine; she believed in her talent, and she believed in her beauty. Her robust faith was somewhat comical to those who heard her staking her future upon it, when remonstrances were made to her.

"I can have income enough when I please," she was wont to say; "I have invested fifty francs on the Grand-livre."

No one could ever understand how it happened that Florine, handsome as she was, had remained in obscurity for seven years; but the fact is, Florine was enrolled as a supernumerary at thirteen years of age, and made her *début* two years later at an obscure boulevard theatre. At fifteen, neither beauty nor talent exist; a woman is simply all promise.

She was now twenty-eight, — the age at which the beauties of a French woman are in their glory. Painters particularly admired the lustre of her white shoulders, tinted with olive tones about the nape of the neck, and wonderfully firm and polished, so that the light shimmered over them as it does on watered silk. When she turned her head, superb folds formed about her neck, the admiration of sculptors. She carried on this triumphant neck the small head of a Roman empress, the delicate, round, and self-willed head of Pompeia, with features of elegant correctness, and the smooth forehead of a woman who drives all care away and all reflection, who yields easily, but is capable of

balking like a mule, and incapable at such times of listening to reason. That forehead, turned, as it were, with one cut of the chisel, brought out the beauty of the golden hair, which was raised in front, after the Roman fashion, in two equal masses, and twisted up behind the head to prolong the line of the neck, and enhance that whiteness by its beautiful color. Black and delicate eyebrows, drawn by a Chinese brush, encircled the soft eyelids, which were threaded with rosy fibres. The pupils of the eyes, extremely bright, though striped with brown rays, gave to her glance the cruel fixity of a beast of prey, and betrayed the cold maliciousness of the courtesan. The eyes were gray, fringed with black lashes, — a charming contrast, which made their expression of calm and contemplative voluptuousness the more observable; the circle round the eyes showed marks of fatigue, but the artistic manner in which she could turn her eyeballs, right and left, or up and down, to observe, or seem to meditate, the way in which she could hold them fixed, casting out their vivid fire without moving her head, without taking from her face its absolute immovability (a manœuvre learned upon the stage), and the vivacity of their glance, as she looked about a theatre in search of a friend, made her eyes the most terrible, also the softest, in short, the most extraordinary eyes in the world. Rouge had destroyed by this time the diaphanous tints of her cheeks, the flesh of which was still delicate; but though she could no longer blush or turn pale, she had a thin nose with rosy, passionate nostrils, made to express irony, — the mocking irony of Molière's women-servants. Her

sensual mouth, expressive of sarcasm and love of dissipation, was adorned with a deep furrow that united the upper lip with the nose. Her chin, white and rather fat, betrayed the violence of passion. Her hands and arms were worthy of a sovereign.

But she had one ineradicable sign of low birth, — her foot was short and fat. No inherited quality ever caused greater distress. Florine had tried everything, short of amputation, to get rid of it. The feet were obstinate, like the Breton race from which she came; they resisted all treatment. Florine now wore long boots stuffed with cotton, to give length, and the semblance of an instep. Her figure was of medium height, threatened with corpulence, but still well-balanced, and well-made.

Morally, she was an adept in all the attitudinizing, quarrelling, alluring, and cajoling of her business; and she gave to those actions a savor of their own by playing childlike innocence, and slipping in among her artless speeches philosophical malignities. Apparently ignorant and giddy, she was very strong on money-matters and commercial law, — for the reason that she had gone through so much misery before attaining to her present precarious success. She had come down, story by story, from the garret to the first floor, through so many vicissitudes! She knew life, from that which begins on Brie cheese and ends at pineapples; from that which cooks and washes in the corner of a garret on an earthenware stove, to that which convokes the tribes of pot-bellied chefs and saucemakers. She had lived on credit and not killed it; she was ignorant of nothing that honest women

ignore; she spoke all languages: she was one of the populace by experience; she was noble by beauty and physical distinction. Suspicious as a spy, or a judge, or an old statesman, she was difficult to impose upon, and therefore the more able to see clearly into most matters. She knew the ways of managing tradespeople, and how to evade their snares, and she was quite as well versed in the prices of things as a public appraiser. To see her lying on her sofa, like a young bride, fresh and white, holding her part in her hand and learning it, you would have thought her a child of sixteen, ingenuous, ignorant, and weak, with no other artifice about her but her innocence. Let a creditor contrive to enter, and she was up like a startled fawn, and swearing a good round oath.

"Hey! my good fellow; your insolence is too dear an interest on the money I owe you," she would say. "I am sick of seeing you. Send the sheriff here; I'd prefer him to your silly face."

Florine gave charming dinners, concerts, and well-attended soirées, where play ran high. Her female friends were all handsome; no old woman had ever appeared within her precincts. She was not jealous; in fact, she would have thought jealousy an admission of inferiority. She had known Coralie and La Torpille in their lifetimes, and now knew Tullia, Euphrasie, Aquilina, Madame du Val-Noble, Mariette, — those women who pass through Paris like gossamer through the atmosphere, without our knowing where they go nor whence they came; to-day queens, to-morrow slaves. She also knew the actresses, her rivals, and all the prima-donnas; in short, that whole



exceptional feminine society, so kindly, so graceful in its easy *sans-souci*, which absorbs into its own Bohemian life all who allow themselves to be caught in the frantic whirl of its gay spirits, its eager abandonment, and its contemptuous indifference to the future.

Though this Bohemian life displayed itself in her house in tumultuous disorder, amid the laughter of artists of every description, the queen of the revels had ten fingers on which she knew better how to count than any of her guests. In that house secret saturnalias of literature and art, politics and finance were carried on; there, desire reigned a sovereign; there, caprice and fancy were as sacred as honor and virtue to a bourgeoisie; thither came Blondet, Finot, Étienne Lousteau, Vernou the feuilletonist, Couture, Bixiou, Rastignac in his earlier days, Claude Vignon the critic, Nucingen the banker, du Tillet, Conti the composer, — in short, that whole devil-may-care legion of selfish materialists of all kinds; friends of Florine and of the singers, actresses and *danseuses* collected about her. They all hated or liked one another according to circumstances.

This Bohemian resort, to which celebrity was the only ticket of admission, was a Hades of the mind, the galleys of the intellect. No one could enter there without having legally conquered fortune, done ten years of misery, strangled two or three passions, acquired some celebrity, either by books or waistcoats, by dramas or fine equipages; plots were hatched there, means of making fortune scrutinized, all things were discussed and weighed. But every man, on leaving it, resumed the livery of his own opinions;

there he could, without compromising himself, criticise his own party, admit the knowledge and good play of his adversaries, formulate thoughts that no one admits thinking, — in short, say all, as if ready to do all. Paris is the only place in the world where such eclectic houses exist; where all tastes, all vices, all opinions are received under decent guise. Therefore it is not yet certain that Florine will remain to the end of her career a second-class actress.

Florine's life was by no means an idle one, or a life to be envied. Many persons, misled by the magnificent pedestal that the stage gives to a woman, suppose her in the midst of a perpetual carnival. In the dark recesses of a porter's lodge, beneath the tiles of an attic roof, many a poor girl dreams, on returning from the theatre, of pearls and diamonds, gold-embroidered gowns and sumptuous girdles; she fancies herself adored, applauded, courted; but little she knows of that treadmill life, in which the actress is forced to rehearsals under pain of fines, to the reading of new pieces, to the constant study of new rôles. At each representation Florine changes her dress at least two or three times; often she comes home exhausted and half-dead; but before she can rest, she must wash off with various cosmetics the white and the red she has applied, and clean all the powder from her hair, if she has played a part from the eighteenth century. She scarcely has time for food. When she plays, an actress can live no life of her own; she can neither dress, nor eat, nor talk. Florine often has no time to sup. On returning from a play, which lasts, in these days, till after midnight,

she does not get to bed before two in the morning; but she must rise early to study her part, order her dresses, try them on, breakfast, read her love-letters, answer them, discuss with the leader of the *claque* the place for the plaudits, pay for the triumphs of the last month in solid cash, and bespeak those of the month ahead. In the days of Saint-Genest, the canonized comedian who fulfilled his duties in a pious manner and wore a hair shirt, we must suppose that an actor's life did not demand this incessant activity. Sometimes Florine, seized with a bourgeois desire to get out into the country and gather flowers, pretends to the manager that she is ill.

But even these mechanical occupations are nothing in comparison with the intrigues to be carried on, the pains of wounded vanity to be endured, — preferences shown by authors, parts taken away or given to others, exactions of the male actors, spite of rivals, naggings of the stage manager, struggles with journalists; all of which require another twelve hours to the day. But even so far, nothing has been said of the art of acting, the expression of passion, the practice of positions and gesture, the minute care and watchfulness required on the stage, where a thousand opera-glasses are ready to detect a flaw, — labors which consumed the life and thought of Talma, Lekain, Baron, Contat, Clairon, Champmeslé. In these infernal *coulisses* self-love has no sex; the artist who triumphs, be it man or woman, has all the other men and women against him or her. Then, as to money, however many engagements Florine may have, her salary does not cover the costs of her stage toilet, which, in addition to its costumes,

requires an immense variety of long gloves, shoes, and frippery; and all this exclusive of her personal clothing. The first third of such a life is spent in struggling and imploring; the next third, in getting a foothold; the last third, in defending it. If happiness is frantically grasped, it is because it is so rare, so long desired, and found at last only amid the odious fictitious pleasures and smiles of such a life.

As for Florine, Raoul's power in the press was like a protecting sceptre; he spared her many cares and anxieties; she clung to him less as a lover than a prop; she took care of him like a father, she deceived him like a husband; but she would readily have sacrificed all she had to him. Raoul could, and did do everything for her vanity as an actress, for the peace of her self-love, and for her future on the stage. Without the intervention of a successful author, there is no successful actress; Champmeslé was due to Racine, like Mars to Monvel and Andrieux. Florine could do nothing in return for Raoul, though she would gladly have been useful and necessary to him. She reckoned on the charms of habit to keep him by her; she was always ready to open her salons and display the luxury of her dinners and suppers for his friends, and to further his projects. She desired to be for him what Madame de Pompadour was to Louis XV. All actresses envied Florine's position, and some journalists envied that of Raoul.

Those to whom the inclination of the human mind towards change, opposition, and contrasts is known, will readily understand that after ten years of this lawless Bohemian life, full of ups and downs, of *fêtes*

and sheriffs, of orgies and forced sobrieties, Raoul was attracted to the idea of another love, — to the gentle, harmonious house and presence of a great lady, just as the Comtesse Félix instinctively desired to introduce the torture of great emotions into a life made monotonous by happiness. This law of life is the law of all arts, which exist only by contrasts. A work done without this incentive is the loftiest expression of genius, just as the cloister is the highest expression of the Christian life.

On returning to his lodging from Lady Dudley's ball, Raoul found a note from Florine, brought by her maid, which an invincible sleepiness prevented him from reading at that moment. He fell asleep, dreaming of a gentle love that his life had so far lacked. Some hours later he opened the note, and found in it important news, which neither Rastignac nor de Marsay had allowed to transpire. The indiscretion of a member of the government had revealed to the actress the coming dissolution of the Chamber after the present session. Raoul instantly went to Florine's house and sent for Blondet. In the actress's boudoir, with their feet on the fender, Émile and Raoul analyzed the political situation of France in 1834. On which side lay the best chance of fortune? They reviewed all parties and all shades of party, — pure republicans, presiding republicans, republicans without a republic, constitutionals without a dynasty, ministerial conservatives, ministerial absolutists; also the Right, the aristocratic Right, the legitimist, henriquinquist Right, and the carlist Right. Between the party of resistance and that of action there was no

discussion; they might as well have hesitated between life and death.

At this period a flock of newspapers, created to represent all shades of opinion, produced a fearful pell-mell of political principles. Blondet, the most judicious mind of the day, — judicious for others, never for himself, like some great lawyers unable to manage their own affairs, — was magnificent in such a discussion. The upshot was that he advised Nathan not to apostatize too suddenly.

“Napoleon said it; you can’t make young republics of old monarchies. Therefore, my dear fellow, become the hero, the support, the creator of the Left Centre in the new Chamber, and you’ll succeed. Once admitted into political ranks, once in the government, you can be what you like, — of any opinion that triumphs.”

Nathan was bent on creating a daily political journal and becoming the absolute master of an enterprise which should absorb into it the countless little papers then swarming from the press, and establish ramifications with a review. He had seen so many fortunes made all around him by the press that he would not listen to Blondet, who warned him not to trust to such a venture, declaring that the plan was unsound, so great was the present number of newspapers, all fighting for subscribers. Raoul, relying on his so-called friends and his own courage, was all for daring it; he sprang up eagerly and said, with a proud gesture, —

“I shall succeed.”

“But you have n’t a sou.”

"I will write a play."

"It will fail."

"Let it fail!" replied Nathan.

He rushed through the various rooms of Florine's apartment, followed by Blondet, who thought him crazy, looking with a greedy eye upon the wealth displayed there. Blondet understood that look.

"There's a hundred and more thousand francs in them," he remarked.

"Yes," said Raoul, sighing, as he looked at Florine's sumptuous bedstead; "but I'd rather be a pedler all my life on the boulevard, and live on fried potatoes, than sell one item of this apartment."

"Not one item," said Blondet; "sell all. Ambition is like death; it takes all or nothing."

"No, a hundred times no! I would take anything from my new countess; but rob Florine of her shell? no."

"Upset our money-box, break one's balance-pole, smash our refuge, — yes, that would be serious," said Blondet with a tragic air.

"It seems to me from what I hear that you want to play politics instead of comedies," said Florine, suddenly appearing.

"Yes, my dear, yes," said Raoul, affectionately taking her by the neck and kissing her forehead. "Don't make faces at that; you won't lose anything. A minister can do better than a journalist for the queen of the boards. What parts and what holidays you shall have!"

"Where will you get the money?" she said.

"From my uncle," replied Raoul.

Florine knew Raoul's *uncle*. The word meant usury, as in popular parlance *aunt* means pawn.

"Don't worry yourself, my little darling," said Blondet to Florine, tapping her shoulder. "I'll get him the assistance of Massol, a lawyer who wants to be Keeper of the Seals, and du Tillet, who wants to be deputy; also Finot, who has never yet got beyond his *petit-journal*, and Pantin, who wants to be master of petitions, and who dabbles in reviews. Yes, I'll save him from himself; we'll convoke here to supper Étienne Lousteau, who can do the feuilleton; Claude Vignon for criticisms; Félicien Vernou as general care-taker; the lawyer will work, and du Tillet may take charge of the Bourse, the money article, and all industrial questions. We'll see where these various talents and slaves united will land the enterprise."

"In a hospital or a ministry, — where all men ruined in body or mind are apt to go," said Raoul, laughing.

"Where and when shall we invite them?"

"Here, five days hence."

"Tell me the sum you want," said Florine, simply.

"Well, the lawyer, du Tillet, and Raoul will each have to put up a hundred thousand francs before they embark on the affair," replied Blondet. "Then the paper can run eighteen months; about long enough for a rise and fall in Paris."

Florine gave a little grimace of approval. The two friends jumped into a cabriolet to go about collecting guests and pens, ideas and self-interests.

Florine meantime sent for certain dealers in old furniture, bric-à-brac, pictures, and jewels. These men entered her sanctuary and took an inventory of every



article, precisely as if Florine were dead. She declared she would sell everything at public auction if they did not offer her a proper price. She had had the luck to please, she said, a rich English lord, and she wanted to get rid of all her property and look poor, so that he might give her a fine house and furniture, fit to rival the Rothschilds. But in spite of these persuasions and subterfuges, all the dealers would offer her for a mass of belongings worth a hundred and fifty thousand francs was seventy thousand. Florine thereupon offered to deliver over everything in eight days for eighty thousand, — "To take or leave," she said, — and the bargain was concluded. After the men had departed she skipped for joy, like the hills of King David, and performed all manner of follies, not having thought herself so rich.

When Raoul came back she made him a little scene, pretending to be hurt; she declared that he abandoned her; that she had reflected; men did not pass from one party to another, from the stage to the Chamber, without some reason; there was a woman at the bottom; she had a rival! In short, she made him swear eternal fidelity. Five days later she gave a splendid feast. The new journal was baptized in floods of wine and wit, with oaths of loyalty, fidelity, and good-fellowship. The name, forgotten now like those of the Liberal, Communal, Departmental, Garde National, Federal, Impartial, was something in *al* that was equally imposing and evanescent. At three in the morning Florine could undress and go to bed as if alone, though no one had left the house; these lights of the epoch were sleeping the sleep of brutes. And when, early in

the morning, the packers and vans arrived to remove Florine's treasures she laughed to see the porters moving the bodies of the celebrated men like pieces of furniture that lay in their way. *Sic transit* all her fine things! all her presents and souvenirs went to the shops of the various dealers, where no one on seeing them would know how those flowers of luxury had been originally paid for. It was agreed that a few little necessary articles should be left, for Florine's personal convenience until evening, — her bed, a table, a few chairs, and china enough to give her guests their breakfast.

Having gone to sleep beneath the draperies of wealth and luxury, these distinguished men awoke to find themselves within bare walls, full of nail-holes, degraded into abject poverty.

"Why, Florine! — The poor girl has been seized for debt!" cried Bixiou, who was one of the guests. "Quick! a subscription for her!"

On this they all roused up. Every pocket was emptied and produced a total of thirty-seven francs, which Raoul carried in jest to Florine's bedside. She burst out laughing and lifted her pillow, beneath which lay a mass of bank-notes to which she pointed.

Raoul called to Blondet.

"Ah! I see!" cried Blondet. "The little cheat has sold herself out without a word to us. Well done, you little angel!"

Thereupon, the actress was borne in triumph into the dining-room where most of the party still remained. The lawyer and du Tillet had departed.

That evening Florine had an ovation at the theatre;

the story of her sacrifice had circulated among the audience.

"I'd rather be applauded for my talent," said her rival in the green-room.

"A natural desire in an actress who has never been applauded at all," remarked Florine.

During the evening Florine's maid installed her in Raoul's apartment in the Passage Sandrié. Raoul himself was to encamp in the house where the office of the new journal was established.

Such was the rival of the innocent Madame de Vandenesse. Raoul was the connecting link between the actress and the countess,—a knot severed by a duchess in the days of Louis XV. by the poisoning of Adrienne Lecouvreur; a not inconceivable vengeance, considering the offence.

Florine, however, was not in the way of Raoul's dawning passion. She foresaw the lack of money in the difficult enterprise he had undertaken, and she asked for leave of absence from the theatre. Raoul conducted the negotiation in a way to make himself more than ever valuable to her. With the good sense of the peasant in La Fontaine's fable, who makes sure of a dinner while the patricians talk, the actress went into the provinces to cut faggots for her celebrated man while he was employed in hunting power.

## VI.

## ROMANTIC LOVE.

ON the morrow of the ball given by Lady Dudley, Marie, without having received the slightest declaration, believed that she was loved by Raoul according to the programme of her dreams, and Raoul was aware that the countess had chosen him for her lover. Though neither had reached the incline of such emotions where preliminaries are abridged, both were on the road to it. Raoul, wearied with the dissipations of life, longed for an ideal world, while Marie, from whom the thought of wrong-doing was far, indeed, never imagined the possibility of going out of such a world. No love was ever more innocent or purer than theirs; but none was ever more enthusiastic or more entrancing in thought.

The countess was captivated by ideas worthy of the days of chivalry, though completely modernized. The glowing conversation of the poet had more echo in her mind than in her heart. She thought it fine to be his providence. How sweet the thought of supporting by her white and feeble hand this colossus,—whose feet of clay she did not choose to see; of giving life where life was needed; of being secretly the creator of a career; of helping a man of genius to struggle with fate and master it. Ah! to embroider his scarf for the tournament! to procure him weapons! to be his talis-

man against ill-fortune! his balm for every wound! For a woman brought up like Marie, religious and noble as she was, such a love was a form of charity. Hence the boldness of it. Pure sentiments often compromise themselves with a lofty disdain that resembles the boldness of courtesans.

As soon as by her specious distinctions Marie had convinced herself that she did not in any way impair her conjugal faith, she rushed into the happiness of loving Raoul. The least little things of her daily life acquired a charm. Her boudoir, where she thought of him, became a sanctuary. There was nothing there that did not rouse some sense of pleasure; even her ink-stand was the coming accomplice in the pleasures of correspondence; for she would now have letters to read and answer. Dress, that splendid poesy of the feminine life, unknown or exhausted by her, appeared to her eyes endowed with a magic hitherto unperceived. It suddenly became to her what it is to most women, the manifestation of an inward thought, a language, a symbol. How many enjoyments in a toilet arranged to please *him*, to do *him* honor! She gave herself up ingenuously to all those gracefully charming things in which so many Parisian women spend their lives, and which give such significance to all that we see about them, and in them, and on them. Few women go to milliners and dressmakers for their own pleasure and interest. When old they never think of adornment. The next time you meet in the street a young woman stopping for a moment to look into a shop-window, examine her face carefully. "Will he think I look better in that?" are the words written on

that fair brow, in the eyes sparkling with hope, in the smile that flickers on the lips.

Lady Dudley's ball took place on a Saturday night. On the following Monday the countess went to the Opera, feeling certain of seeing Raoul, who was, in fact, watching for her on one of the stairways leading down to the stalls. With what delight did she observe the unwonted care he had bestowed upon his clothes. This despiser of the laws of elegance had brushed and perfumed his hair; his waistcoat followed the fashion, his cravat was well tied, the bosom of his shirt was irreproachably smooth. Raoul was standing with his arms crossed as if posed for his portrait, magnificently indifferent to the rest of the audience and full of repressed impatience. Though lowered, his eyes were turned to the red velvet cushion on which lay Marie's arm. Félix, seated in the opposite corner of the box, had his back to Nathan.

So, in a moment, as it were, Marie had compelled this remarkable man to abjure his cynicism in the line of clothes. All women, high or low, are filled with delight on seeing a first proof of their power in one of these sudden metamorphoses. Such changes are an admission of serfdom.

"Those women were right; there is a great pleasure in being understood," she said to herself, thinking of her treacherous friends.

When the two lovers had gazed around the theatre with that glance that takes in everything, they exchanged a look of intelligence. It was for each as if some celestial dew had refreshed their hearts, burned-up with expectation.

"I have been here for an hour in purgatory, but now the heavens are opening," said Raoul's eyes.

"I knew you were waiting, but how could I help it?" replied those of the countess.

Thieves, spies, lovers, diplomats, and slaves of any kind alone know the resources and comforts of a glance. They alone know what it contains of meaning, sweetness, thought, anger, villany, displayed by the modification of that ray of light which conveys the soul. Between the box of the Comtesse Félix de Vandenesse and the step on which Raoul had perched there were barely thirty feet; and yet it was impossible to wipe out that distance. To a fiery being, who had hitherto known no space between his wishes and their gratification, this imaginary but insuperable gulf inspired a mad desire to spring to the countess with the bound of a tiger. In a species of rage he determined to try the ground and bow openly to the countess. She returned the bow with one of those slight inclinations of the head with which women take from their adorers all desire to continue their attempt. Comte Félix turned round to see who had bowed to his wife; he saw Nathan, but did not bow, and seemed to inquire the meaning of such audacity; then he turned back slowly and said a few words to his wife. Evidently the door of that box was closed to Nathan, who cast a terrible look of hatred upon Félix.

Madame d'Espard had seen the whole thing from her box, which was just above where Raoul was standing. She raised her voice in crying bravo to some singer, which caused Nathan to look up to her; he bowed and received in return a gracious smile which seemed to say: —

"If they won't admit you there come here to me."

Raoul obeyed the silent summons and went to her box. He felt the need of showing himself in a place which might teach that little Vandenesse that fame was every whit as good as nobility, and that all doors turned on their hinges to admit him. The marquise made him sit in front of her. She wanted to question him.

"Madame Félix de Vandenesse is fascinating in that gown," she said, complimenting the dress as if it were a book he had published the day before.

"Yes," said Raoul, indifferently, "marabouts are very becoming to her; but she seems wedded to them; she wore them on Saturday," he added, in a careless tone, as if to repudiate the intimacy Madame d'Espard was fastening upon him.

"You know the proverb," she replied. "There is no good fête without a morrow."

In the matter of repartees literary celebrities are often not as quick as women. Raoul pretended dullness, a last resource for clever men.

"That proverb is true in my case," he said, looking gallantly at the marquise.

"My dear friend, your speech comes too late; I can't accept it," she said, laughing. "Don't be so prudish! Come, I know how it was; you complimented Madame de Vandenesse at the ball on her marabouts, and she has put them on again for your sake. She likes you, and you adore her; it may be a little rapid, but it is all very natural. If I were mistaken you would n't be twisting your gloves like a man who is furious at having to sit here with me instead



of flying to the box of his idol. She has obtained," continued Madame d'Espard, glancing at his person impertinently, "certain sacrifices which you refused to make to society. She ought to be delighted with her success, — in fact, I have no doubt she is vain of it; I should be so in her place — immensely. She was never a woman of any mind, but she may now pass for one of genius. I am sure you will describe her in one of those delightful novels you write. And pray don't forget Vandenesse; put him in to please me. Really, his self-sufficiency is too much. I can't stand that Jupiter Olympian air of his, — the only mythological character exempt, they say, from ill-luck."

"Madame," cried Raoul, "you rate my soul very low if you think me capable of trafficking with my feelings, my affections. Rather than commit such literary baseness, I would do as they do in England, — put a rope round a woman's neck and sell her in the market."

"But I know Marie; she would like you to do it."

"She is incapable of liking it," said Raoul, vehemently.

"Oh! then you do know her well?"

Nathan laughed; he, the maker of scenes, to be trapped into playing one himself!

"Comedy is no longer there," he said, nodding at the stage; "it is here, in you."

He took his opera-glass and looked about the theatre to recover countenance.

"You are not angry with me, I hope?" said the marquise, giving him a sidelong glance. "I should

have had your secret somehow. Let us make peace. Come and see me; I receive every Wednesday, and I am sure the dear countess will never miss an evening if I let her know you will be there. So I shall be the gainer. Sometimes she comes between four and five o'clock, and I'll be kind and add you to the little set of favorites I admit at that hour."

"Ah!" cried Raoul, "how the world judges; it calls you unkind."

"So I am when I need to be," she replied. "We must defend ourselves. But your countess I adore; you will be contented with her; she is charming. Your name will be the first engraved upon her heart with that infantine joy that makes a lad cut the initials of his love on the barks of trees."

Raoul was aware of the danger of such conversations, in which a Parisian woman excels; he feared the marquise would extract some admission from him which she would instantly turn into ridicule among her friends. He therefore withdrew, prudently, as Lady Dudley entered.

"Well?" said the Englishwoman to the marquise, "how far have they got?"

"They are madly in love; he has just told me so."

"I wish he were uglier," said Lady Dudley, with a viperish look at Comte Félix. "In other respects he is just what I want him: the son of a Jew broker who died a bankrupt soon after his marriage; but the mother was a Catholic, and I am sorry to say she made a Christian of the boy."

This origin, which Nathan thought carefully concealed, Lady Dudley had just discovered, and she

enjoyed by anticipation the pleasure she should have in launching some terrible epigram against Vandenesse.

"Heavens! I have just invited him to my house!" cried Madame d'Espard.

"Did n't I receive him at my ball?" replied Lady Dudley. "Some pleasures, my dear love, are costly."

The news of the mutual attachment between Raoul and Madame de Vandenesse circulated in the world after this, but not without exciting denials and incredulity. The countess, however, was defended by her friends, Lady Dudley, and Mesdames d'Espard and de Manerville, with an unnecessary warmth that gave a certain color to the calumny.

On the following Wednesday evening Raoul went to Madame d'Espard's, and was able to exchange a few sentences with Marie, more expressive by their tones than their ideas. In the midst of the elegant assembly both found pleasure in those enjoyable sensations given by the voice, the gestures, the attitude of one beloved. The soul then fastens upon absolute nothings. No longer do ideas or even language speak, but things; and these so loudly, that often a man lets another pay the small attentions — bring a cup of tea, or the sugar to sweeten it — demanded by the woman he loves, fearful of betraying his emotion to eyes that seem to see nothing and yet see all. Raoul, however, a man indifferent to the eyes of the world, betrayed his passion in his speech and was brilliantly witty. The company listened to the roar of a discourse inspired by the restraint put upon him; restraint being that which artists cannot endure. This Rolandie

fury, this wit which slashed down all things, using epigram as its weapon, intoxicated Marie and amused the circle around them, as the sight of a bull goaded with banderols amuses the company in a Spanish circus.

"You may kick as you please, but you can't make a solitude about you," whispered Blondet.

The words brought Raoul to his senses, and he ceased to exhibit his irritation to the company. Madame d'Espard came up to offer him a cup of tea, and said loud enough for Madame de Vandenesse to hear:—

"You are certainly *véry* amusing; come and see me sometimes at four o'clock."

The word "amusing" offended Raoul, though it was used as the ground of an invitation. Blondet took pity on him.

"My dear fellow," he said, taking him aside into a corner, "you are behaving in society as if you were at Florine's. Here no one shows annoyance, or spouts long articles; they say a few words now and then, they look their calmest when most desirous of flinging others out of the window; they sneer softly, they pretend not to think of the woman they adore, and they are careful not to roll like a donkey on the high-road. In society, my good Raoul, conventions rule love. Either carry off Madame de Vandenesse, or show yourself a gentleman. As it is, you are playing the lover in one of your own books."

Nathan listened with his head lowered; he was like a lion caught in a toil.

"I'll never set foot in this house again," he cried.

"That papier-mâché marquise sells her tea too dear. She thinks me amusing! I understand now why Saint-Just wanted to guillotine this whole class of people!"

"You'll be back here to-morrow."

Blondet was right. Passions are as mean as they are cruel. The next day after long hesitation between "I'll go — I'll not go," Raoul left his new partners in the midst of an important discussion and rushed to Madame d'Espard's house in the faubourg Saint-Honoré. Beholding Rastignac's elegant cabriolet enter the court-yard while he was paying his cab at the gate, Nathan's vanity was stung; he resolved to have a cabriolet himself, and its accompanying tiger, too. The carriage of the countess was in the courtyard, and the sight of it swelled Raoul's heart with joy. Marie was advancing under the pressure of her desires with the regularity of the hands of a clock obeying the mainspring. He found her sitting at the corner of the fireplace in the little salon. Instead of looking at Nathan when he was announced, she looked at his reflection in a mirror.

"Monsieur le ministre," said Madame d'Espard, addressing Nathan, and presenting him to de Marsay by a glance, "was maintaining, when you came in, that the royalists and the republicans have a secret understanding. You ought to know something about it; is it so?"

"If it were so," said Raoul, "where's the harm? We hate the same thing; we agree as to our hatreds, we differ only in our love. That's the whole of it."

"The alliance is odd enough," said de Marsay, giv-

ing a comprehensively meaning glance at the Comtesse Félix and Nathan.

"It won't last," said Rastignac, thinking, perhaps, wholly of politics.

"What do you think, my dear?" asked Madame d'Espard, addressing Marie.

"I know nothing of public affairs," replied the countess.

"But you soon will, madame," said de Marsay, "and then you will be doubly our enemy."

So saying he left the room with Rastignac, and Madame d'Espard accompanied them to the door of the first salon. The lovers had the room to themselves for a few moments. Marie held out her ungloved hand to Raoul, who took and kissed it as though he were eighteen years old. The eyes of the countess expressed so noble a tenderness that the tears which men of nervous temperament can always find at their service came into Raoul's eyes.

"Where can I see you? where can I speak with you?" he said. "It is death to be forced to disguise my voice, my look, my heart, my love—"

Moved by that tear Marie promised to drive daily in the Bois, unless the weather were extremely bad. This promise gave Raoul more pleasure than he had found in Florine for the last five years.

"I have so many things to say to you! I suffer from the silence to which we are condemned —"

The countess looked at him eagerly without replying, and at that moment Madame d'Espard returned to the room.

"Why did n't you answer de Marsay?" she said as she entered.

"We ought to respect the dead," replied Raoul. "Don't you see that he is dying? Rastignac is his nurse, — hoping to be put in the will."

The countess pretended to have other visits to pay, and left the house.

For this quarter of an hour Raoul had sacrificed important interests and most precious time. Marie was perfectly ignorant of the life of such men, involved in complicated affairs and burdened with exacting toil. Women of society are still under the influence of the traditions of the eighteenth century, in which all positions were definite and assured. Few women know the harassments in the life of most men who in these days have a position to make and to maintain, a fame to reach, a fortune to consolidate. Men of settled wealth and position can now be counted; old men alone have time to love; young men are rowing, like Nathan, the galleys of ambition. Women are not yet resigned to this change of customs; they suppose the same leisure of which they have too much in those who have none; they cannot imagine other occupations, other ends in life than their own. When a lover has vanquished the Lernean hydra in order to pay them a visit he has no merit in their eyes; they are only grateful to him for the pleasure he gives; they neither know nor care what it costs. Raoul became aware as he returned from this visit how difficult it would be to hold the reins of a love-affair in society, the ten-horsed chariot of journalism, his dramas on the stage, and his generally involved affairs.

"The paper will be wretched to-night," he thought,

as he walked away. "No article of mine, and only the second number, too!"

Madame Félix de Vandenesse drove three times to the Bois de Boulogne without finding Raoul; the third time she came back anxious and uneasy. The fact was that Nathan did not choose to show himself in the Bois until he could go there as a prince of the press. He employed a whole week in searching for horses, a phaeton and a suitable tiger, and in convincing his partners of the necessity of saving time so precious to them, and therefore of charging his equipage to the costs of the journal. His associates, Massol and du Tillet agreed to this so readily that he really believed them the best fellows in the world. Without this help, however, life would have been simply impossible to Raoul; as it was, it became so irksome that many men, even those of the strongest constitutions, could not have borne it. A violent and successful passion takes a great deal of space in an ordinary life; but when it is connected with a woman in the social position of Madame de Vandenesse it sucks the life out of a man as busy as Raoul. Here is a list of the obligations his passion imposed upon him.

Every day, or nearly every day, he was obliged to be on horseback in the Bois, between two and three o'clock, in the careful dress of a gentleman of leisure. He had to learn at what house or theatre he could meet Madame de Vandenesse in the evening. He was not able to leave the party or the play until long after midnight, having obtained nothing better than a few tender sentences, long awaited, said in a doorway, or



hastily as he put her into her carriage. It frequently happened that Marie, who by this time had launched him into the great world, procured for him invitations to dinner in certain houses where she went herself. All this seemed the simplest life in the world to her. Raoul moved by pride and led on by his passion never told her of his labors. He obeyed the will of this innocent sovereign, followed in her train, followed, also, the parliamentary debates, edited and wrote for his newspaper, and put upon the stage two plays, the money for which was absolutely indispensable to him. It sufficed for Madame de Vandenesse to make a little face of displeasure when he tried to excuse himself from attending a ball, a concert, or from driving in the Bois, to compel him to sacrifice his most pressing interests to her good pleasure. When he left society between one and two in the morning he went straight to work until eight or nine. He was scarcely asleep before he was obliged to be up and concocting the opinions of his journal with the men of political influence on whom he depended, — not to speak of the thousand and one other details of the paper. Journalism is connected with everything in these days; with industrial concerns, with public and private interests, with all new enterprises, and all the schemes of literature, its self-loves, and its products.

When Nathan, harassed and fatigued, would rush from his editorial office to the theatre, from the theatre to the Chamber, from the Chamber to face certain creditors, he was forced to appear in the Bois with a calm countenance, and gallop beside Marie's carriage in the leisurely style of a man devoid of cares and

with no other duties than those of love. When in return for this toilsome and wholly ignored devotion all he won were a few sweet words, the prettiest assurances of eternal attachment, ardent pressures of the hand on the very few occasions when they found themselves alone, he began to feel he was rather duped by leaving his mistress in ignorance of the enormous costs of these "little attentions," as our fathers called them. The occasion for an explanation arrived in due time.

On a fine April morning the countess accepted Nathan's arm for a walk through a sequestered path of the Bois de Boulogne. She intended to make him one of those pretty little quarrels apropos of nothing, which women are so fond of exciting. Instead of greeting him as usual, with a smile upon her lips, her forehead illumined with pleasure, her eyes bright with some gay or delicate thought, she assumed a grave and serious aspect.

"What is the matter?" said Nathan.

"Why do you pretend to such ignorance?" she replied. "You ought to know that a woman is not a child."

"Have I displeased you?"

"Should I be here if you had?"

"But you don't smile to me; you don't seem happy to see me."

"Oh! do you mean to accuse me of sulking?" she said, looking at him with that submissive air which women assume when they want to seem victims.

Nathan walked on a few steps in a state of real apprehension which oppressed him.

"It must be," he said, after a moment's silence,

"one of those frivolous fears, those hazy suspicions which women dwell on more than they do on the great things of life. You all have a way of tipping the world sideways with a straw, a cobweb —"

"Sarcasm!" she said. "I might have expected it."

"Marie, my angel, I only said those words to wring your secret out of you."

"My secret would be always a secret, even if I told it to you."

"But all the same, tell it to me."

"I am not loved," she said, giving him one of those sly oblique glances with which women question so maliciously the men they are trying to torment.

"Not loved!" cried Nathan.

"No; you are too occupied with other things. What am I to you in the midst of them? forgotten on the least occasion! Yesterday I came to the Bois and you were not here —"

"But —"

"I had put on a new dress expressly to please you; you did not come; where were you?"

"But —"

"I did not know where. I went to Madame d'Espard's; you were not there."

"But —"

"That evening at the Opera, I watched the balcony; every time a door opened my heart was beating!"

"But —"

"What an evening I had! You don't reflect on such tempests of the heart."

"But —"

"Life is shortened by such emotions."

"But —"

"Well, what?" she said.

"You are right; life is shortened by them," said Nathan, "and in a few months you will utterly have consumed mine. Your unreasonable reproaches drag my secret from me — Ha! you say you are not loved; you are loved too well."

And thereupon he vividly depicted his position, told of his sleepless nights, his duties at certain hours, the absolute necessity of succeeding in his enterprise, the insatiable requirements of a newspaper in which he was required to judge the events of the whole world without blundering, under pain of losing his power, and so losing all, the infinite amount of rapid study he was forced to give to questions which passed as rapidly as clouds in this all-consuming age, etc., etc.

Raoul made a great mistake. The Marquise d'Espard had said to him on one occasion, "Nothing is more naïve than a first love." As he unfolded before Marie's eyes this life which seemed to her immense, the countess was overcome with admiration. She had thought Nathan grand, she now considered him sublime. She blamed herself for loving him too much; begged him to come to her only when he could do so without difficulty. Wait? indeed she could wait! In future, she should know how to sacrifice her enjoyments. Wishing to be his stepping-stone was she really an obstacle? She wept with despair.

"Women," she said, with tears in her eyes, "can only love; men act; they have a thousand ways in which they are bound to act. But we can only think, and pray, and worship."

A love that had sacrificed so much for her sake deserved a recompense. She looked about her like a nightingale descending from a leafy covert to drink at a spring, to see if she were alone in the solitude, if the silence hid no witness; then she raised her head to Raoul, who bent his own, and let him take one kiss, the first and the only one she ever gave in secret, feeling happier at that moment than she had felt in five years. Raoul thought all his toils well-paid. They both walked forward they scarcely knew where, but it was on the road to Auteuil; presently, however, they were forced to return and find their carriages, pacing together with the rhythmic step well-known to lovers. Raoul had faith in that kiss given with the quiet facility of a sacred sentiment. All the evil of it was in the mind of the world, not in that of the woman who walked beside him. Marie herself, given over to the grateful admiration which characterizes the love of woman, walked with a firm, light step on the gravelled path, saying, like Raoul, but few words; yet those few were felt and full of meaning. The sky was cloudless, the tall trees had bourgeoned, a few green shoots were already brightening their myriad of brown twigs. The shrubs, the birches, the willows, the poplars were showing their first diaphanous and tender foliage. No soul resists these harmonies. Love explained Nature as it had already explained society to Marie's heart.

"I wish you had never loved any one but me," she said.

"Your wish is realized," replied Raoul. "We have awakened in each other the only true love."

He spoke the truth as he felt it. Posing before this innocent young heart as a pure man, Raoul was caught himself by his own fine sentiments. At first purely speculative and born of vanity, his love had now become sincere. He began by lying, he had ended in speaking truth. In all writers there is ever a sentiment, difficult to stifle, which impels them to admire the highest good. The countess, on her part, after her first rush of gratitude and surprise, was charmed to have inspired such sacrifices, to have caused him to surmount such difficulties. She was beloved by a man who was worthy of her! Raoul was totally ignorant to what his imaginary grandeur bound him. Women will not suffer their idol to step down from his pedestal. They do not forgive the slightest pettiness in a god. Marie was far from knowing the solution of the riddle given by Raoul to his friends at Very's. The struggle of this writer, risen from the lower classes, had cost him the ten first years of his youth; and now in the days of his success he longed to be loved by one of the queens of the great world. Vanity, without which, as Champfort says, love would be but a feeble thing, sustained his passion and increased it day by day.

"Can you swear to me," said Marie, "that you belong and will never belong to any other woman?"

"There is neither time in my life nor place in my heart for any other woman," replied Raoul, not thinking that he told a lie, so little did he value Florine.

"I believe you," she said.

When they reached the alley where their carriages were waiting, Marie dropped Raoul's arm, and the

young man assumed a respectful and distant attitude as if he had just met her; he accompanied her, with his hat off, to her carriage, then he followed her by the Avenue Charles X., breathing in, with satisfaction, the very dust her calèche raised.

In spite of Marie's high renunciations, Raoul continued to follow her everywhere; he adored the air of mingled pleasure and displeasure with which she scolded him for wasting his precious time. She took direction of his labors, she gave him formal orders on the employment of his time; she stayed at home to deprive him of every pretext for dissipation. Every morning she read his paper, and became the herald of his staff of editors, of Étienne Lousteau the feuilletonist, whom she thought delightful, of Félicien Vernon, of Claude Vignon, — in short, of the whole staff. She advised Raoul to do justice to de Marsay when he died, and she read with deep emotion the noble eulogy which Raoul published upon the dead minister while blaming his Machiavelianism and his hatred for the masses. She was present, of course, at the Gymnase on the occasion of the first representation of the play upon the proceeds of which Nathan relied to support his enterprise, and was completely duped by the purchased applause.

"You did not bid farewell to the Italian opera," said Lady Dudley, to whose house she went after the performance.

"No, I went to the Gymnase. They gave a first representation."

"I can't endure vaudevilles. I am like Louis XIV. about Teniers," said Lady Dudley.

"For my part," said Madame d'Espard, "I think actors have greatly improved. Vaudevilles in the present day are really charming comedies, full of wit, requiring great talent; they amuse me very much."

"The actors are excellent, too," said Marie. "Those at the Gymnase played very well to-night; the piece pleased them; the dialogue was witty and keen."

"Like those of Beaumarchais," said Lady Dudley.

"Monsieur Nathan is not Molière as yet, but —" said Madame d'Espard, looking at the countess.

"He makes vaudevilles," said Madame Charles de Vandenesse.

"And unmakes ministries," added Madame de Manerville.

The countess was silent; she wanted to answer with a sharp repartee; her heart was bounding with anger, but she could find nothing better to say than, —

"He will make them, perhaps."

All the women looked at each other with mysterious significance. When Marie de Vandenesse departed Moina de Saint-Héren exclaimed: —

"She adores him."

"And she makes no secret of it," said Madame d'Espard.



## VII.

## SUICIDE.

IN the month of May Vandenesse took his wife, as usual, to their country-seat, where she was consoled by the passionate letters she received from Raoul, to whom she wrote every day.

Marie's absence might have saved Raoul from the gulf into which he was falling, if Florine had been near him; but, unfortunately, he was alone in the midst of friends who had become his enemies from the moment that he showed his intention of ruling them. His staff of writers hated him *pro tem.*, ready to hold out a hand to him and console him in case of a fall, ready to adore him in case of success. So goes the world of literature. No one is really liked but an inferior. Every man's hand is against him who is likely to rise. This wide-spread envy doubles the chances of common minds who excite neither envy nor suspicion, who make their way like moles, and, fools though they be, find themselves gazetted in the "Moniteur," for three or four places, while men of talent are still struggling at the door to keep each other out.

The underhand enmity of these pretended friends, which Florine would have scented with the innate faculty of a courtesan to get at truth amid a thousand

misleading circumstances, was by no means Raoul's greatest danger. His partners, Massol the lawyer, and du Tillet the banker, had intended from the first to harness his ardor to the chariot of their own importance and get rid of him as soon as he was out of condition to feed the paper, or else to deprive him of his power, arbitrarily, whenever it suited their purpose to take it. To them Nathan represented a certain amount of talent to use up, a literary force of the motive power of ten pens to employ. Massol, one of those lawyers who mistake the faculty of endless speech for eloquence, who possess the art of boring by diffusiveness, the torment of all meetings and assemblies where they belittle everything, and who desire to become personages at any cost, — Massol no longer wanted the place as Keeper of the Seals; he had seen some five or six different men go through that office in four years, and the robes disgusted him. In exchange, his mind was now set on obtaining a chair on the Board of Education and a place in the Council of State; the whole adorned with the cross of the Legion of honor. Du Tillet and Nucingen had guaranteed the cross to him, and the office of Master of Petitions provided he obeyed them blindly.

The better to deceive Raoul, these men allowed him to manage the paper without control. Du Tillet used it only for his stock-gambling, about which Nathan understood next to nothing; but he had given, through Nucingen, an assurance to Rastignac that the paper would be tacitly obliging to the government on the sole condition of supporting his candidacy for Monsieur de Nucingen's place as soon as he was nominated peer

of France. Raoul was thus being undermined by the banker and the lawyer, who saw him with much satisfaction lording it in the newspaper, profiting by all advantages, and harvesting the fruits of self-love, while Nathan, enchanted, believed them to be, as on the occasion of his equestrian wants, the best fellows in the world. He thought he managed them! Men of imagination, to whom hope is the basis of existence, never allow themselves to know that the most perilous moment in their affairs is that when all seems going well according to their wishes.

This was a period of triumph by which Nathan profited. He appeared as a personage in the world, political and financial. Du Tillet presented him to the Nucingens. Madame de Nucingen received him cordially, less for himself than for Madame de Vandenesse; but when she ventured a few words about the countess he thought himself marvellously clever in using Florine as a shield; he alluded to his relations with the actress in a tone of generous self-conceit. How could he desert a great devotion, for the coquetries of the faubourg Saint-Germain?

Nathan, manipulated by Nucingen and Rastignac, by du Tillet and Blondet, gave his support ostentatiously to the *doctrinaires* of their new and ephemeral cabinet. But in order to show himself pure of all bribery he refused to take advantage of certain profitable enterprises which were started by means of his paper, — he! who had no reluctance in compromising friends or in behaving with little decency to mechanics under certain circumstances. Such meannesses, the result of vanity and of ambition, are found in many

lives like his. The mantle must be splendid before the eyes of the world, and we steal our friend's or a poor man's cloth to patch it.

Nevertheless, two months after the departure of the countess, Raoul had a certain Rabelaisian *quart d'heure* which caused him some anxiety in the midst of these triumphs. Du Tillet had advanced a hundred thousand francs, Florine's money had gone in the costs of the first establishment of the paper, which were enormous. It was necessary to provide for the future. The banker agreed to let the editor have fifty thousand francs on notes for four months. Du Tillet thus held Raoul by the halter of an I O U. By means of this relief the funds of the paper were secured for six months. In the eyes of some writers six months is an eternity. Besides, by dint of advertising and by offering illusory advantages to subscribers two thousand had been secured; an influx of travellers added to this semi-success, which was enough, perhaps, to excuse the throwing of more bank-bills after the rest. A little more display of talent, a timely political trial or crisis, an apparent persecution, and Raoul felt certain of becoming one of those modern *condottieri* whose ink is worth more than the powder and shot of the olden time.

This loan from du Tillet was already made when Florine returned with fifty thousand francs. Instead of creating a savings fund with that sum, Raoul, certain of success (simply because he felt it was necessary), and already humiliated at having accepted the actress's money, deceived Florine as to his actual position, and persuaded her to employ the money in refur-

nishing her house. The actress, who did not need persuasion, not only spent the sum in hand, but she burdened herself with a debt of thirty thousand francs, with which she obtained a charming little house all to herself in the rue Pigale, whither her old society resorted. Raoul had reserved the production of his great piece, in which was a part especially suited to Florine, until her return. This comedy-vaudeville was to be Raoul's farewell to the stage. The newspapers, with that good nature which costs nothing, prepared the way for such an ovation to Florine that even the Théâtre-Français talked of engaging her. The feuilletons proclaimed her the heiress of Mars.

This triumph was sufficiently dazzling to prevent Florine from carefully studying the ground on which Nathan was advancing; she lived, for the time being, in a round of festivities and glory. According to those about her, he was now a great political character; he was justified in his enterprise; he would certainly be a deputy, probably a minister in course of time, like so many others. As for Nathan himself, he firmly believed that at the next session of the Chamber he should find himself in the government with two other journalists, one of whom, already a minister, was anxious to associate some of his own craft with himself, and so consolidate his power. After a separation of six months, Nathan met Florine again with pleasure, and returned easily to his old way of life. All his comforts came from the actress, but he embroidered the heavy tissue of his life with the flowers of ideal passion; his letters to Marie were masterpieces of grace and style. Nathan made her the light

of his life; he undertook nothing without consulting his "guardian angel." In despair at being on the popular side, he talked of going over to that of the aristocracy; but, in spite of his habitual agility, even he saw the absolute impossibility of such a jump; it was easier to become a minister. Marie's precious replies were deposited in one of those portfolios with patent locks made by Huret or Fichet, two mechanics who were then waging war in advertisements and posters all over Paris, as to which could make the safest and most impenetrable locks.

This portfolio was left about in Florine's new boudoir, where Nathan did much of his work. No one is easier to deceive than a woman to whom a man is in the habit of telling everything; she has no suspicions; she thinks she sees and hears and knows all. Besides, since her return, Nathan had led the most regular of lives under her very nose. Never did she imagine that that portfolio, which she hardly glanced at as it lay there unconcealed, contained the letters of a rival, treasures of admiring love which the countess addressed, at Raoul's request, to the office of his newspaper.

Nathan's situation was, therefore, to all appearance, extremely brilliant. He had many friends. The two plays lately produced had succeeded well, and their proceeds supplied his personal wants and relieved him of all care for the future. His debt to du Tillet, "his friend," did not make him in the least uneasy.

"Why distrust a friend?" he said to Blondet, who from time to time would cast a doubt on his position, led to do so by his general habit of analyzing.

"But we don't need to distrust our enemies," remarked Florine.

Nathan defended du Tillet; he was the best, the most upright of men.

This existence, which was really that of a dancer on the tight rope without his balance-pole, would have alarmed any one, even the most indifferent, had it been seen as it really was. Du Tillet watched it with the cool eye and the cynicism of a parvenu. Through the friendly good humor of his intercourse with Raoul there flashed now and then a malignant jeer. One day, after pressing his hand in Florine's boudoir and watching him as he got into his carriage, du Tillet remarked to Lousteau (*envier par excellence*):—

"That fellow is off to the Bois in fine style to-day, but he is just as likely, six months hence, to be in a debtor's prison."

"He? never!" cried Lousteau. "He has Florine."

"How do you know that he'll keep her? As for you, who are worth a dozen of him, I predict that you will be our editor-in-chief within six months."

In October Nathan's notes to du Tillet fell due, and the banker graciously renewed them, but for two months only, with the discount added and a fresh loan. Sure of victory, Raoul was not afraid of continuing to put his hand in the bag. Madame Félix de Vandenesse was to return in a few days, a month earlier than usual, brought back, of course, by her unconquerable desire to see Nathan, who felt that he could not be short of money at a time when he renewed that assiduous life.

Correspondence, in which the pen is always bolder than speech, and thought, wreathing itself with flowers,

allows itself to be seen without disguise, had brought the countess to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. She believed she saw in Raoul one of the noblest spirits of the epoch, a delicate but misjudged heart without a stain and worthy of adoration; she saw him advancing with a brave hand to grasp the sceptre of power. Soon that speech so beautiful in love would echo from the tribune. Marie now lived only in this life of a world outside her own. Her taste was lost for the tranquil joys of home, and she gave herself up to the agitations of this whirlwind life communicated by a clever and adoring pen. She kissed Raoul's letters, written in the midst of the ceaseless battles of the press, with time taken from necessary studies; she felt their value; she was certain of being loved, and loved only, with no rival but the fame and the ambition he adored. She found enough in her country solitude to fill her soul and employ all her faculties, — happy, indeed, to have been so chosen by such a man, who to her was an angel.

During the last days of autumn Marie and Raoul again met and renewed their walks in the Bois, where alone they could see each other until the salons reopened. But when the winter fairly began, Raoul appeared in social life at his apogee. He was almost a personage. Rastignac, now out of power with the ministry, which went to pieces on the death of de Marsay, leaned upon Nathan, and gave him in return the warmest praise. Madame de Vandenesse, feeling this change in public opinion, was desirous of knowing if her husband's judgment had altered also. She questioned him again; perhaps with the hope of



obtaining one of those brilliant revenges which please all women, even the noblest and least worldly, — for may we not believe that even the angels retain some portion of their self-love as they gather in serried ranks before the Holy of Holies?

“Nothing was wanting to Raoul Nathan but to be the dupe he now is to a parcel of intriguing sharpers,” replied the count.

Félix, whose knowledge of the world and politics enabled him to judge clearly, had seen Nathan’s true position. He explained to his wife that Fieschi’s attempt had resulted in attaching to the interests threatened by this attack on Louis-Philippe a large body of hitherto lukewarm persons. The newspapers which were non-committal, and did not show their colors, would lose subscribers; for journalism, like politics, was about to be simplified by falling into regular lines. If Nathan had put his whole fortune into that newspaper he would lose it. This judgment, so apparently just and clear-cut, though brief and given by a man who fathomed a matter in which he had no interest, alarmed Madame de Vandenesse.

“Do you take an interest in him?” asked her husband.

“Only as a man whose mind interests me and whose conversation I like.”

This reply was made so naturally that the count suspected nothing.

The next day at four o’clock, Marie and Raoul had a long conversation together, in a low voice, in Madame d’Espard’s salon. The countess expressed fears which Raoul dissipated, only too happy to

destroy by epigrams the conjugal judgment. Nathan had a revenge to take. He characterized the count as narrow-minded, behind the age, a man who judged the revolution of July with the eyes of the Restoration, who would never be willing to admit the triumph of the middle-classes — the new force of all societies, whether temporary or lasting, but a real force. Instead of turning his mind to the study of an opinion given impartially and incidentally by a man well-versed in politics, Raoul mounted his stilts and stalked about in the purple of his own glory. Where is the woman who would not have believed his glowing talk sooner than the cold logic of her husband? Madame de Vandenesse, completely reassured, returned to her life of little enjoyments, clandestine pressures of the hand, occasional quarrels, — in short, to her nourishment of the year before, harmless in itself, but likely to drag a woman over the border if the man she favors is resolute and impatient of obstacles. Happily for her, Nathan was not dangerous. Besides, he was too full of his immediate self-interests to think at this time of profiting by his love.

But toward the end of December, when the second notes fell due, du Tillet demanded payment. The rich banker, who said he was embarrassed, advised Raoul to borrow the money for a short time from a usurer, from Gigonnet, the providence of all young men who were pressed for money. In January, he remarked, the renewal of subscriptions to the paper would be coming in, there would be plenty of money in hand, and they could then see what had best be done. Besides, couldn't Nathan write a play? As a matter of pride

Raoul determined to pay off the notes at once. Du Tillet gave Raoul a letter to Gigonnet, who counted out the money on a note of Nathan's at twenty days' sight. Instead of asking himself the reason of such unusual facility, Raoul felt vexed at his folly in not having asked for more. That is how men who are really remarkable for the power of thought are apt to behave in practical business; they seem to reserve the power of their mind for their writings, and are fearful of lessening it by putting it to use in the daily affairs of life.

Raoul related his morning to Florine and Blondet. He gave them an inimitable sketch of Gigonnet, his fireplace without fire, his shabby wall-paper, his stairway, his asthmatic bell, his aged straw mattress, his den without warmth, like his eye. He made them laugh about this new uncle; they neither troubled themselves about du Tillet and his pretended want of money, nor about an old usurer so ready to disburse. What was there to worry about in that?

"He has only asked you fifteen per cent," said Blondet; "you ought to be grateful to him. At twenty-five per cent you don't bow to those old fellows. This is money-lending; usury does n't begin till fifty per cent; and then you despise the usurer."

"Despise him!" cried Florine; "if any of your friends lent you the money at that price they'd pose as your benefactors."

"She is right; and I am glad I don't owe anything now to du Tillet," said Raoul.

Why this lack of penetration as to their personal affairs in men whose business it is to penetrate all

things? Perhaps the mind cannot be complete at all points; perhaps artists of every kind live too much in the present moment to study the future; perhaps they are too observant of the ridiculous to notice snares, or they may believe that none would dare to lay a snare for such as they. However this may be, the future arrived in due time. Twenty days later Raoul's notes were protested, but Florine obtained from the Court of commerce an extension of twenty-five days in which to meet them. Thus pressed, Raoul looked into his affairs and asked for the accounts, and it then appeared that the receipts of the newspaper covered only two-thirds of the expenses, while the subscriptions were rapidly dwindling. The great man now grew anxious and gloomy, but to Florine only, in whom he confided. She advised him to borrow money on unwritten plays, and write them at once, giving a lien on his work. Nathan followed this advice and obtained thereby twenty thousand francs, which reduced his debt to forty thousand.

On the 10th of February the twenty-five days expired. Du Tillet, who did not want Nathan as a rival before the electoral college, where he meant to appear himself, instigated Gignonnet to sue Nathan without compromise. A man locked up for debt could not present himself as a candidate for election. Florine was herself in communication with the sheriff on the subject of her personal debts, and no resource was left to her but the "I" of Medea, for her new furniture and belongings were now attached. The ambitious Raoul heard the cracking in all directions of his prosperous edifice, built, alas! without foundations.

His nerve failed him; too weak already to sustain so vast an enterprise, he felt himself incapable of attempting to build it up again; he was fated to perish in its ashes. Love for the countess gave him still a few thrills of life; his mask brightened for a moment, but behind it hope was dead. He did not suspect the hand of du Tillet, and laid the blame of his misfortunes on the usurer. Rastignac, Blondet, Lousteau, Vernou, Finot, and Massol took care not to enlighten him. Rastignac, who wanted to return to power, made common cause with Nucingen and du Tillet. The others felt a satisfaction in the catastrophe of an equal who had attempted to make himself their master. None of them, however, would have said a word to Florine; on the contrary, they praised Raoul to her.

"Nathan," they said, "has the shoulders of Atlas; he'll pull himself through; all will come right."

"There were two new subscribers yesterday," said Blondet, gravely. "Raoul will certainly be elected deputy. As soon as the budget is voted the dissolution is sure to take place."

But Nathan, sued, could no longer obtain even usury; Florine, with all her personal property attached, could count on nothing but inspiring a passion in some fool who might not appear at the right moment. Nathan's friends were all men without money and without credit. An arrest for debt would destroy his hopes of a political career; and besides all this, he had bound himself to do an immense amount of dramatic work for which he had already received payment. He could see no bottom to the gulf of misery that lay before him, into which he was about

to roll. In presence of such threatened evil his boldness deserted him. Would the Comtesse de Vandenesse stand by him? Would she fly with him? Women are never led into a gulf of that kind except by an absolute love, and the love of Raoul and Marie had not bound them together by the mysterious and inalienable ties of happiness. But supposing that the countess did follow him to some foreign country; she would come without fortune, despoiled of everything, and then, alas! she would merely be one more embarrassment to him. A mind of a second order, and a proud mind like that of Nathan, would be likely to see, under these circumstances, and did see, in suicide the sword to cut the Gordian knots. The idea of failure in the face of the world and that society he had so lately entered and meant to rule, of leaving the chariot of the countess and becoming once more a muddled pedestrian, was more than he could bear. Madness began to dance and whirl and shake her bells at the gates of the fantastic palace in which the poet had been dreaming. In this extremity, Nathan waited for some lucky accident, determined not to kill himself until the final moment.

During the last days employed by the legal formalities required before proceeding to arrest for debt, Raoul went about, in spite of himself, with that coldly sullen and morose expression of face which may be noticed in persons who are either fated to commit suicide or are meditating it. The funereal ideas they are turning over in their minds appear upon their foreheads in gray and cloudy tints, their smile has something fatalistic in it, their motions are solemn. These

unhappy beings seem to want to suck the last juices of the life they mean to leave; their eyes see things invisible, their ears are listening to a death-knell, they pay no attention to the minor things about them. These alarming symptoms Marie perceived one evening at Lady Dudley's. Raoul was sitting apart on a sofa in the boudoir, while the rest of the company were conversing in the salon. The countess went to the door, but he did not raise his head; he heard neither Marie's breathing nor the rustle of her silk dress; he was gazing at a flower in the carpet, with fixed eyes, stupid with grief; he felt he had rather die than abdicate. All the world can't have the rock of Saint Helena for a pedestal. Moreover, suicide was then the fashion in Paris. Is it not, in fact, the last resource of all atheistical societies? Raoul, as he sat there, had decided that the moment had come to die. Despair is in proportion to our hopes; that of Raoul had no other issue than the grave.

"What is the matter?" cried Marie, flying to him.

"Nothing," he answered.

There is one way of saying that word *nothing* between lovers which signifies its exact contrary. Marie shrugged her shoulders.

"You are a child," she said. "Some misfortune has happened to you."

"No, not to me," he replied. "But you will know all soon enough, Marie," he added, affectionately.

"What were you thinking of when I came in?" she asked, in a tone of authority.

"Do you want to know the truth?" She nodded. "I was thinking of you; I was saying to myself that

most men in my place would have wanted to be loved without reserve. I am loved, am I not?"

"Yes," she answered.

"And yet," he said, taking her round the waist and kissing her forehead at the risk of being seen, "I leave you pure and without remorse. I could have dragged you into an abyss, but you remain in all your glory on its brink without a stain. Yet one thought troubles me —"

"What is it?" she asked.

"You will despise me." She smiled superbly. "Yes, you will never believe that I have sacredly loved you; I shall be disgraced, I know that. Women never imagine that from the depths of our mire we raise our eyes to heaven and truly adore a Marie. They assail that sacred love with miserable doubts; they cannot believe that men of intellect and poesy can so detach their soul from earthly enjoyment as to lay it pure upon some cherished altar. And yet, Marie, the worship of the ideal is more fervent in men than in women; we find it in women, who do not even look for it in us."

"Why are you making me that article?" she said, jestingly.

"I am leaving France; you will hear to-morrow, how and why, from a letter my valet will bring you. Adieu, Marie."

Raoul left the house after again straining the countess to his heart with dreadful pressure, leaving her stupefied and distressed.

"What is the matter, my dear?" said Madame d'Espard, coming to look for her. "What has Mon-



sieur Nathan been saying to you? He has just left us in a most melodramatic way. Perhaps you are too reasonable or too unreasonable with him."

The countess followed Madame d'Espard back into the salon, but she left the house a few moments later, and returned home a prey to an anxiety that was wholly undefined. Unable to sleep, she passed the night in reading a journey to the North Pole, of which she understood absolutely nothing. At half-past eight in the morning she received a letter from Raoul and tore it open. The letter began with the classic words: —

"My dear, beloved Marie, when you hold this paper in your hand I shall be no more —" \*

She read no farther, but crumpled up the letter in her nervous clasp, rang for her maid, slipped on a morning-gown and the first shoes she could find; put on a bonnet and shawl and left the room, telling her maid to say to the count that she had gone to see her sister, Madame du Tillet.

"Where did you leave your master?" she said to Raoul's servant.

"At his office," replied the man.

"Let us go there," she said. "Come."

To the astonishment of her household she left the house on foot before nine o'clock, evidently almost beside herself. Fortunately the maid went at once to the count and told him that her mistress had received a letter from Madame du Tillet which seemed to have distressed her very much, and that she had gone out instantly, accompanied by the servant who brought the letter. Vandenesse therefore felt no uneasiness,

and awaited his wife's return to receive her explanations.

The countess got into a hackney-coach and was driven rapidly to the newspaper offices. At that hour the huge apartments which they occupied in an old mansion in the rue Feydeau were deserted; not a soul was there but the watchman, who was greatly surprised to see a young and pretty woman hurrying through the rooms in evident distress. She asked him to tell her where was Monsieur Nathan.

"At Mademoiselle Florine's, probably," replied the man, taking Marie for a rival who intended to make a scene.

"Where does he work?"

"In his office, the key of which he carries in his pocket."

"I wish to go there."

The man took her to a dark little room looking out on a rear court-yard. The office was at right angles. Opening the window of the room she was in, the countess could look through into the window of the office, and she saw Nathan sitting there in the editorial arm-chair.

"Break in the door, and be silent about all this; I'll pay you well," she said. "Don't you see that Monsieur Nathan is dying?"

The man got an iron bar from the press-room, with which he burst in the door. Raoul had actually smothered himself, like any poor work-girl, with a pan of charcoal. He had written a letter to Blondet, which lay on the table, in which he asked him to ascribe his death to apoplexy. The countess, however, had

arrived in time; she had Raoul carried to her coach, and then, not knowing where else to care for him, she took him to a hotel, engaged a room, and sent for a doctor. In a few hours Raoul was out of danger; but the countess did not leave him until she had obtained a general confession of the causes of his act. When he had poured into her heart the dreadful elegy of his woes, she said, in order to make him willing to live:—

“I can arrange all that.”

But, nevertheless, she returned home with a heart oppressed with the same anxieties and ideas that had darkened Nathan’s brow the night before.

“Well, what was the matter with your sister?” said Félix, when his wife returned. “You look distressed.”

“It is a dreadful history about which I am bound to secrecy,” she said, summoning all her nerve to appear calm before him.

In order to be alone and to think at her ease, she went to the Opera in the evening, after which she resolved to go (as we have seen) and discharge her heart into that of her sister, Madame du Tillet; relating to her the horrible scene of the morning, and begging her advice and assistance. Neither the one nor the other could then know that du Tillet himself had lighted the charcoal of the vulgar brazier, the sight of which had so justly terrified the countess.

“He has but me in all the world,” said Marie to her sister, “and I will not fail him.”

That speech contains the secret motive of most women; they can be heroic when they are certain of being all in all to a grand and irreproachable being.

## VIII.

## A LOVER SAVED AND LOST.

Du TILLET had heard some talk even in financial circles of the more or less possible adoration of his sister-in-law for Nathan; but he was one of those who denied it, thinking it incompatible with Raoul's known relations with Florine. The actress would certainly drive off the countess, or *vice versa*. But when, on coming home that evening, he found his sister-in-law with a perturbed face, in consultation with his wife about money, it occurred to him that Raoul had, in all probability, confided to her his situation. The countess must therefore love him; she had doubtless come to obtain from her sister the sum due to old Gigonnet. Madame du Tillet, unaware, of course, of the reasons for her husband's apparently supernatural penetration, had shown such stupefaction when he told her the sum wanted, that du Tillet's suspicions became certainties. He was sure now that he held the thread of all Nathan's possible manœuvres.

No one knew that the unhappy man himself was in bed in a small hotel in the rue du Mail, under the name of the office watchman, to whom Marie had promised five hundred francs if he kept silence as to the events of the preceding night and morning. Thus bribed, the man, whose name was François Quillet,

went back to the office and left word with the portress that Monsieur Nathan had been taken ill in consequence of overwork, and was resting. Du Tillet was therefore not surprised at Raoul's absence. It was natural for the journalist to hide under any such pretence to avoid arrest. When the sheriff's spies made inquiries they learned that a lady had carried him away in a public coach early in the morning; but it took three days to ferret out the number of the coach, question the driver, and find the hotel where the debtor was recovering his strength. Thus Marie's prompt action had really gained for Nathan a truce of four days.

Both sisters passed a cruel night. Such a catastrophe casts the lurid gleam of its charcoal over the whole of life, showing reefs, pools, depths, where the eye has hitherto seen only summits and grandeurs. Struck by the horrible picture of a young man lying back in his chair to die, with the last proofs of his paper before him, containing in type his last thoughts, poor Madame du Tillet could think of nothing else than how to save him and restore a life so precious to her sister. It is the nature of our mind to see effects before we analyze their causes. Eugénie recurred to her first idea of consulting Madame Delphine de Nucingen, with whom she was to dine, and she resolved to make the attempt, not doubting of success. Generous, like all persons who are not bound in the polished steel armor of modern society, Madame du Tillet resolved to take the whole matter upon herself.

The countess, on the other hand, happy in the thought that she had saved Raoul's life, spent the night in devising means to obtain the forty thousand

frances. In emergencies like these women are sublime; they find contrivances which would astonish thieves, business men, and usurers, if those three classes of industrials were capable of being astonished. First, the countess sold her diamonds and decided on wearing paste; then she resolved to ask the money from Vandenesse on her sister's account; but these were dishonorable means, and her soul was too noble not to recoil at them; she merely conceived them, and cast them from her. Ask money of Vandenesse to give to Nathan! She bounded in her bed with horror at such baseness. Wear false diamonds to deceive her husband! Next she thought of borrowing the money from the Rothschilds, who had so much, or from the archbishop of Paris, whose mission it was to help persons in distress; darting thus from thought to thought, seeking help in all. She deplored belonging to a class opposed to the government. Formerly, she could easily have borrowed the money on the steps of the throne. She thought of appealing to her father, the Comte de Granville. But that great magistrate had a horror of illegalities; his children knew how little he sympathized with the trials of love; he was now a misanthrope and held all affairs of the heart in horror. As for the Comtesse de Granville, she was living a retired life on one of her estates in Normandy, economizing and praying, ending her days between priests and money-bags, cold as ever to her dying moment. Even supposing that Marie had time to go to Bayeux and implore her, would her mother give her such a sum unless she explained why she wanted it? Could she say she had debts? Yes, perhaps her

mother would be softened by the wants of her favorite child. Well, then! in case all other means failed, she *would* go to Normandy. The dreadful sight of the morning, the efforts she had made to revive Nathan, the hours passed beside his pillow, his broken confession, the agony of a great soul, a vast genius stopped in its upward flight by a sordid vulgar obstacle, — all these things rushed into her memory and stimulated her love. She went over and over her emotions, and felt her love to be deeper in these days of misery than in those of Nathan's fame and grandeur. She felt the nobility of his last words said to her in Lady Dudley's boudoir. What sacredness in that farewell! What grandeur in the immolation of a selfish happiness which would have been her torture! The countess had longed for emotions, and now she had them, — terrible, cruel, and yet most precious. She lived a deeper life in pain than in pleasure. With what delight she said to herself: "I have saved him once, and I will save him again." She heard him cry out when he felt her lips upon his forehead, "Many a poor wretch does not know what love is!"

"Are you ill?" said her husband, coming into her room to take her to breakfast.

"I am dreadfully worried about a matter that is happening at my sister's," she replied, without actually telling a lie.

"Your sister has fallen into bad hands," replied Félix. "It is a shame for any family to have a du Tillet in it, — a man without honor of any kind. If disaster happened to her she would get no pity from him."

"What woman wants pity?" said the countess, with a convulsive motion. "A man's sternness is to us our only pardon."

"This is not the first time that I read your noble heart," said the count. "A woman who thinks as you do needs no watching."

"Watching!" she said; "another shame that recoils on you."

Félix smiled, but Marie blushed. When women are secretly to blame they often show ostensibly the utmost womanly pride. It is a dissimulation of mind for which we ought to be obliged to them. The deception is full of dignity, if not of grandeur. Marie wrote two lines to Nathan under the name of Monsieur Quillet, to tell him that all went well, and sent them by a street porter to the hotel du Mail. That night, at the Opera, Félix thought it very natural that she should wish to leave her box and go to that of her sister, and he waited till du Tillet had left his wife to give Marie his arm and take her there. Who can tell what emotions agitated her as she went through the corridors and entered her sister's box with a face that was outwardly serene and calm!

"Well?" she said, as soon as they were alone.

Eugénie's face was an answer; it was bright with a joy which some persons might have attributed to the satisfaction of vanity.

"He can be saved, dear; but for three months only; during which time we must plan some other means of doing it permanently. Madame de Nucingen wants four notes of hand, each for ten thousand francs, endorsed by any one, no matter who, so as not to



compromise you. She explained to me how they were made, but I could n't understand her. Monsieur Nathan, however, can make them for us. I thought of Schmucke, our old master. I am sure he could be very useful in this emergency; he will endorse the notes. You must add to the four notes a letter in which you guarantee their payment to Madame de Nucingen, and she will give you the money to-morrow. Do the whole thing yourself; don't trust it to any one. I feel sure that Schmucke will make no objection. To divert all suspicion I told Madame de Nucingen you wanted to oblige our old music-master who was in distress, and I asked her to keep the matter secret."

"You have the sense of angels! I only hope Madame de Nucingen won't tell of it until after she gives me the money," said the countess.

"Schmucke lives in the rue de Nevers on the quai Conti; don't forget the address, and go yourself."

"Thanks!" said the countess, pressing her sister's hand. "Ah! I'd give ten years of life —"

"Out of your old age —"

"If I could put an end to these anxieties," said the countess, smiling at the interruption.

The persons who were at that moment levelling their opera-glasses at the two sisters might well have supposed them engaged in some light-hearted talk; but any observer who had come to the Opera more for the pleasure of watching faces than for mere idle amusement might have guessed them in trouble, from the anxious look which followed the momentary smiles on their charming faces.

The next morning, by half-past eight, Marie had driven to the quai Conti, stopping at the hotel du Mail on her way. The carriage could not enter the narrow rue de Nevers; but as Schmucke lived in a house at the corner of the quai she was not obliged to walk up its muddy pavement, but could jump from the step of her carriage to the broken step of the dismal old house, mended like porter's crockery, with iron rivets, and bulging out over the street in a way that was quite alarming to pedestrians. The old chapel-master lived on the fourth floor, and enjoyed a fine view of the Seine from the pont Neuf to the heights of Chaillot.

The good soul was so surprised when the countess's footman announced the visit of his former scholar that in his stupefaction he let her enter without going down to receive her. Never did the countess suspect or imagine such an existence as that which suddenly revealed itself to her eyes, though she had long known Schmucke's contempt for dress, and the little interest he felt in the affairs of this world. But who could have believed in such complete indifference, in the utter *laissez-aller* of such a life? Schmucke was a musical Diogenes, and he felt no shame whatever in his untidiness; in fact, he was so accustomed to it that he would probably have denied its existence. The incessant smoking of a stout German pipe had spread upon the ceiling and over a wretched wall-paper, scratched and defaced by the cat, a yellowish tinge. The cat, a magnificently long-furred, fluffy animal, the envy of all portresses, presided there like the mistress of the house, grave and sedate, and without anxieties.

On the top of an excellent Viennese piano he sat majestically, and cast upon the countess, as she entered, that coldly gracious look which a woman, surprised by the beauty of another woman, might have given. He did not move, and merely waved the two silver threads of his right whisker as he turned his golden eyes on Schmucke.

The piano, decrepit on its legs, though made of good wood painted black and gilded, was dirty, defaced, and scratched; and its keys, worn like the teeth of old horses, were yellowed with the fuliginous colors of the pipe. On the desk, a little heap of ashes showed that the night before Schmucke had bestrode the old instrument to some musical Walhalla. The floor, covered with dried mud, torn papers, tobacco-dust, fragments indescribable, was like that of a boy's school-room, unswept for a week, on which a mound of things accumulate, half rags, half filth.

A more practised eye than that of the countess would have seen certain other revelations of Schmucke's mode of life, — chestnut-peels, apple-parings, egg-shells dyed red in broken dishes smeared with sauer-kraut. This German detritus formed a carpet of dusty filth which crackled under foot, joining company near the hearth with a mass of cinders and ashes descending majestically from the fireplace, where lay a block of coal, before which two slender twigs made a show of burning. On the chimney-piece was a mirror in a painted frame, adorned with figures dancing a saraband; on one side hung the glorious pipe, on the other was a Chinese jar in which the musician kept his tobacco. Two arm-chairs bought at auc-

tion, a thin and rickety cot, a worm-eaten bureau without a top, a maimed table on which lay the remains of a frugal breakfast, made up a set of household belongings as plain as those of an Indian wigwam. A shaving-glass, suspended to the fastening of a curtainless window, and surmounted by a rag striped by many wipings of a razor, indicated the only sacrifices paid by Schmucke to the Graces and society. The cat, being the feeble and protected partner, had rather the best of the establishment; he enjoyed the comforts of an old sofa-cushion, near which could be seen a white china cup and plate. But what no pen can describe was the state into which Schmucke, the cat, and the pipe, that existing trinity, had reduced these articles. The pipe had burned the table. The cat and Schmucke's head had greased the green Utrecht velvet of the two arm-chairs and reduced it to a slimy texture. If it had not been for the cat's magnificent tail, which played a useful part in the household, the uncovered places on the bureau and the piano would never have been dusted. In one corner of the room were a pile of shoes which need an epic to describe them. The top of the bureau and that of the piano were encumbered by music-books with ragged backs and whitened corners, through which the pasteboard showed its many layers. Along the walls the names and addresses of pupils written on scraps of paper were stuck on by wafers, — the number of wafers without paper indicating the number of pupils no longer taught. On the wall-papers were many calculations written with chalk. The bureau was decorated with beer-mugs used the night before, their newness ap-

pearing very brilliant in the midst of this rubbish of dirt and age. Hygiene was represented by a jug of water with a towel laid upon it, and a bit of common soap. Two ancient hats hung to their respective nails, near which also hung the self-same blue box-coat with three capes, in which the countess had always seen Schmucke when he came to give his lessons. On the window-sill were three pots of flowers, German flowers, no doubt, and near them a stout holly-wood stick.

Though Marie's sight and smell were disagreeably affected, Schmucke's smile and glance disguised these abject miseries by rays of celestial light which actually illuminated their smoky tones and vivified the chaos. The soul of this dear man, which saw and revealed so many things divine, shone like the sun. His laugh, so frank, so guileless at seeing one of his Saint-Cecilias, shed sparkles of youth and gayety and innocence about him. The treasures he poured from the inner to the outer were like a mantle with which he covered his squalid life. The most supercilious parvenu would have felt it ignoble to care for the frame in which this glorious old apostle of the musical religion lived and moved and had his being.

"Hey! by what good luck do I see you here, dear Madame la comtesse?" he said. "Must I sing the canticle of Simeon at my age?" (This idea so tickled him that he laughed immoderately.) "Truly I'm *en bonne fortune*." (And again he laughed like a merry child). "But, ah!" he said, changing to melancholy, you come for the music, and not for a poor old man like me. Yes, I know that; but come for what you will, I am yours, you know, body and soul and all I have!"

This was said in his unspeakable German accent, a rendition of which we spare the reader.

He took the countess's hand, kissed it and left a tear there, for the worthy soul was always on the morrow of her benefit. Then he seized a bit of chalk, jumped on a chair in front of the piano, and wrote upon the wall in big letters, with the rapidity of a young man, "February 17th, 1835." This pretty, artless action, done in such a passion of gratitude, touched the countess to tears.

"My sister will come, too," she said.

"The other, too! When? when? God grant it be before I die!"

"She will come to thank you for a great service I am now here to ask of you."

"Quick! quick! tell me what it is," cried Schmucke. "What must I do? go to the devil?"

"Nothing more than to write the words 'Accepted for ten thousand francs,' and sign your name on each of these papers," she said, taking from her muff four notes prepared for her by Nathan.

"Hey! that's soon done," replied the German, with the docility of a lamb; "only I'm sure I don't know where my pens and ink are — Get away from there, Meinherr Mirr!" he cried to the cat, which looked composedly at him. "That's my cat," he said, showing him to the countess. "That's the poor animal that lives with poor Schmucke. Has n't he fine fur?"

"Yes," said the countess.

"Will you have him?" he cried.

"How can you think of such a thing?" she answered. "Why, he's your friend!"

The cat, who hid the inkstand behind him, divined that Schmucke wanted it, and jumped to the bed.

"He 's as mischievous as a monkey," said Schmucke. "I call him *Mirr* in honor of our great Hoffmann of Berlin, whom I knew well."

The good man signed the papers with the innocence of a child who does what his mother orders without question, so sure is he that all is right. He was thinking much more of presenting the cat to the countess than of the papers by which his liberty might be, according to the laws relating to foreigners, forever sacrificed.

"You assure me that these little papers with the stamps on them —"

"Don't be in the least uneasy," said the countess.

"I am not uneasy," he said, hastily. "I only meant to ask if these little papers will give pleasure to Madame du Tillet."

"Oh, yes," she said, "you are doing her a service, as if you were her father."

"I am happy, indeed, to be of any good to her — Come and listen to my music!" and leaving the papers on the table, he jumped to his piano.

The hands of this angel ran along the yellowing keys, his glance was rising to heaven, regardless of the roof; already the air of some blessed climate permeated the room and the soul of the old musician; but the countess did not allow the artless interpreter of things celestial to make the strings and the worn wood speak, like Raffaele's Saint Cecilia, to the listening angels. She quickly slipped the notes into her muff and recalled her radiant master from the

ethereal spheres to which he soared, by laying her hand upon his shoulder.

"My good Schmucke — " she said.

"Going already?" he cried. "Ah! why did you come?"

He did not murmur, but he sat up like a faithful dog who listens to his mistress.

"My good Schmucke," she repeated, "this is a matter of life and death; minutes can save tears, perhaps blood."

"Always the same!" he said. "Go, angel! dry the tears of others. Your poor Schmucke thinks more of your visit than of your gifts."

"But we must see each other often," she said. "You must come and dine and play to me every Sunday, or we shall quarrel. Remember, I shall expect you next Sunday."

"Really and truly?"

"Yes, I entreat you; and my sister will want you, too, for another day."

"Then my happiness will be complete," he said; "for I only see you now in the Champs Élysées as you pass in your carriage, and that is very seldom."

This thought dried the tears in his eyes as he gave his arm to his beautiful pupil, who felt the old man's heart beat violently.

"You think of us?" she said.

"Always as I eat my food," he answered, — "as my benefactresses; but chiefly as the first young girls worthy of love whom I ever knew."

So respectful, faithful, and religious a solemnity was in this speech that the countess dared say no



more. That smoky chamber, full of dirt and rubbish, was the temple of two divinities.

"There we are loved — and truly loved," she thought.

The emotion with which old Schmucke saw the countess get into her carriage and leave him she fully shared, and she sent him from the tips of her fingers one of those pretty kisses which women give each other from afar. Receiving it, the old man stood planted on his feet for a long time after the carriage had disappeared.

A few moments later the countess entered the courtyard of the hôtel de Nucingen. Madame de Nucingen was not yet up; but anxious not to keep a woman of the countess's position waiting, she hastily threw on a shawl and wrapper.

"My visit concerns a charitable action, madame," said the countess, "or I would not disturb you at so early an hour."

"But I am only too happy to be disturbed," said the banker's wife, taking the notes and the countess's guarantee. She rang for her maid.

"Thérèse," she said, "tell the cashier to bring me up himself, immediately, forty thousand francs."

Then she locked into a table drawer the guarantee given by Madame de Vandenesse, after sealing it up.

"You have a delightful room," said the countess.

"Yes, but Monsieur de Nucingen is going to take it from me. He is building a new house."

"You will doubtless give this one to your daughter, who, I am told, is to marry Monsieur de Rastignac."

The cashier appeared at this moment with the

money. Madame de Nucingen took the bank-bills and gave him the notes of hand.

"That balances," she said.

"Except the discount," replied the cashier. "Ha, Schmucke; that's the musician of Anspach," he added, examining the signatures in a suspicious manner that made the countess tremble.

"Who is doing this business?" said Madame de Nucingen, with a haughty glance at the cashier. "This is my affair."

The cashier looked alternately at the two ladies, but he could discover nothing on their impenetrable faces.

"Go, leave us — Have the kindness to wait a few moments that the people in the bank may not connect you with this negotiation," said Madame de Nucingen to the countess.

"I must ask you to add to all your other kindness that of keeping this matter secret," said Madame de Vandenesse.

"Most assuredly, since it is for a charity," replied the baroness, smiling. "I will send your carriage round to the garden gate, so that no one will see you leave the house."

"You have the thoughtful grace of a person who has suffered," said the countess.

"I do not know if I have grace," said the baroness; "but I have suffered much. I hope that your anxieties cost less than mine."

When a man has laid a plot like that du Tillet was scheming against Nathan, he confides it to no man. Nucingen knew something of it, but his wife knew

nothing. The baroness, however, aware that Raoul was embarrassed, was not the dupe of the two sisters; she guessed into whose hands that money was to go, and she was delighted to oblige the countess; moreover, she felt a deep compassion for all such embarrassments. Rastignac, so placed that he was able to fathom the manoeuvres of the two bankers, came to breakfast that morning with Madame de Nucingen.

Delphine and Rastignac had no secrets from each other; and the baroness related to him her scene with the countess. Eugène, who had never supposed that Delphine could be mixed up in the affair, which was only accessory to his eyes, — one means among many others, — opened her eyes to the truth. She had probably, he told her, destroyed du Tillet's chances of election, and rendered useless the intrigues and deceptions of the past year. In short, he put her in the secret of the whole affair, advising her to keep absolute silence as to the mistake she had just committed.

"Provided the cashier does not tell Nucingen," she said.

A few moments after mid-day, while du Tillet was breakfasting, Monsieur Gigonnet was announced.

"Let him come in," said the banker, though his wife was at table. "Well, my old Shylock, is our man locked up?"

"No."

"Why not? Did n't I give you the address, rue du Mail, hôtel —"

"He has paid up," said Gigonnet, drawing from his wallet a pile of bank-bills. Du Tillet looked furious.

"You should never frown at money," said his impassible associate; "it brings ill-luck."

"Where did you get that money, madame?" said du Tillet, suddenly turning upon his wife with a look which made her color to the roots of her hair.

"I don't know what your question means," she said.

"I will fathom this mystery," he cried, springing furiously up. "You have upset my most cherished plans."

"You are upsetting your breakfast," said Gigonnet, arresting the table-cloth, which was dragged by the skirt of du Tillet's dressing-gown.

Madame du Tillet rose to leave the room, for her husband's words alarmed her. She rang the bell, and a footman entered.

"The carriage," she said. "And call Virginie; I wish to dress."

"Where are you going?" exclaimed du Tillet.

"Well-bred husbands do not question their wives," she answered. "I believe that you lay claim to be a gentleman."

"I don't recognize you ever since you have seen more of your impertinent sister."

"You ordered me to be impertinent, and I am practising on you," she replied.

"Your servant, madame," said Gigonnet, taking leave, not anxious to witness this family scene.

Du Tillet looked fixedly at his wife, who returned the look without lowering her eyes.

"What does all this mean?" he said.

"It means that I am no longer a little girl whom you can frighten," she replied. "I am, and shall be,

all my life, a good and loyal wife to you; you may be my master if you choose, my tyrant, never!"

Du Tillet left the room. After this effort Marie-Eugénie broke down.

"If it were not for my sister's danger," she said to herself, "I should never have dared to brave him thus; but, as the proverb says, 'There's some good in every evil.'"

## IX.

## THE HUSBAND'S TRIUMPH.

DURING the preceding night Madame du Tillet had gone over in her mind her sister's revelations. Sure, now, of Nathan's safety, she was no longer influenced by the thought of an imminent danger in that direction. But she remembered the vehement energy with which the countess had declared that she would fly with Nathan if that would save him. She saw that the man might determine her sister in some paroxysm of gratitude and love to take a step which was nothing short of madness. There were recent examples in the highest society of just such flights which paid for doubtful pleasures by lasting remorse and the disrepute of a false position. Du Tillet's speech brought her fears to a point; she dreaded lest all should be discovered; she knew her sister's signature was in Nucingen's hands, and she resolved to entreat Marie to save herself by confessing all to Félix.

She drove to her sister's house, but Marie was not at home. Félix was there. A voice within her cried aloud to Eugénie to save her sister; the morrow might be too late. She took a vast responsibility upon herself, but she resolved to tell all to the count. Surely he would be indulgent when he knew that his honor was still safe. The countess was deluded rather

than sinful. Eugénie feared to be treacherous and base in revealing secrets that society (agreeing on this point) holds to be inviolable; but — she saw her sister's future, she trembled lest she should some day be deserted, ruined by Nathan, poor, suffering, disgraced, wretched, and she hesitated no longer; she sent in her name and asked to see the count.

Félix, astonished at the visit, had a long conversation with his sister-in-law, in which he seemed so calm, so completely master of himself, that she feared he might have taken some terrible resolution.

"Do not be uneasy," he said, seeing her anxiety. "I will act in a manner which shall make your sister bless you. However much you may dislike to keep the fact that you have spoken to me from her knowledge, I must entreat you to do so. I need a few days to search into mysteries which you don't perceive; and, above all, I must act cautiously. Perhaps I can learn all in a day. I, alone, my dear sister, am the guilty person. All lovers play their game, and it is not every woman who is able, unassisted, to see life as it is."

Madame du Tillet returned home comforted. Félix de Vandenesse drew forty thousand francs from the Bank of France, and went direct to Madame de Nucingen. He found her at home, thanked her for the confidence she had placed in his wife, and returned the money, explaining that the countess had obtained this mysterious loan for her charities, which were so profuse that he was trying to put a limit to them.

"Give me no explanations, monsieur, since Madame de Vandenesse has told you all," said the Baronne de Nucingen.

"She knows the truth," thought Vandenesse.

Madame de Nucingen returned to him Marie's letter of guarantee and sent to the bank for the four notes. Vandenesse, during the short time that these arrangements kept him waiting, watched the baroness with the eye of a statesman, and he thought the moment propitious for further negotiation.

"We live in an age, madame, when nothing is sure," he said. "Even thrones rise and fall in France with fearful rapidity. Fifteen years have wreaked their will on a great empire, a monarchy, and a revolution. No one can now dare to count upon the future. You know my attachment to the cause of legitimacy. Suppose some catastrophe; would you not be glad to have a friend in the conquering party?"

"Undoubtedly," she said, smiling.

"Very good; then, will you have in me, secretly, an obliged friend who could be of use to Monsieur de Nucingen in such a case, by supporting his claim to the peerage he is seeking?"

"What do you want of me?" she asked.

"Very little," he replied. "All that you know about Nathan's affairs."

The baroness repeated to him her conversation with Rastignac, and said, as she gave him the four notes, which the cashier had meantime brought to her:

"Don't forget your promise."

So little did Vandenesse forget this illusive promise that he used it again on Baron Eugène de Rastignac to obtain from him certain other information. Leaving Rastignac's apartments, he dictated to a street-amanuensis the following note to Florine.



"If Mademoiselle Florine wishes to know of a part she may play she is requested to come to the masked opera at the Opera next Sunday night, accompanied by Monsieur Nathan."

To this ball he determined to take his wife and let her own eyes enlighten her as to the relations between Nathan and Florine. He knew the jealous pride of the countess; he wanted to make her renounce her love of her own will, without causing her to blush before him, and then to return to her her own letters, sold by Florine, from whom he expected to be able to buy them. This judicious plan, rapidly conceived and partly executed, might fail through some trick of chance which meddles with all things here below.

After dinner that evening, Félix brought the conversation round to the masked balls of the Opera, remarking that Marie had never been to one, and proposing that she should accompany him the following evening.

"I'll find you some one to *intriguer*," he said.

"Ah! I wish you would," she replied.

"To do the thing well, a woman ought to fasten upon some good prey, some celebrity, a man of enough wit to give and take. There's Nathan; will you have him? I know, through a friend of Florine, certain secrets of his which would drive him crazy."

"Florine?" said the countess. "Do you mean the actress?"

Marie had already heard that name from the lips of the watchman Quillet; it now shot like a flash of lightning through her soul.

"Yes, his mistress," replied the count. "What is there so surprising in that?"

"I thought Monsieur Nathan too busy to have a mistress. Do authors have time to make love?"

"I don't say they love, my dear, but they are forced to *lodge* somewhere, like other men, and when they haven't a home of their own they *lodge* with their mistresses; which may seem to you rather loose, but it is far more agreeable than lodging in a prison."

Fire was less red than Marie's cheeks.

"Will you have him for a victim? I can help you to terrify him," continued the count, not looking at his wife's face. "I'll put you in the way of proving to him that he is being tricked like a child by your brother-in-law du Tillet. That wretch is trying to put Nathan in prison so as to make him ineligible to stand against him in the electoral college. I know, through a friend of Florine, the exact sum derived from the sale of her furniture, which she gave to Nathan to found his newspaper; I know, too, what she sent him out of her summer's harvest in the departments and in Belgium, — money which has really gone to the profit of du Tillet, Nucingen, and Massol. All three of them, unknown to Nathan, have privately sold the paper to the new ministry, so sure are they of ejecting him."

"Monsieur Nathan is incapable of accepting money from an actress."

"You don't know that class of people, my dear," said the count. "He would not deny the fact if you asked him."

"I will certainly go to the ball," said the countess.

"You will be very much amused," replied Vandenesse. "With such weapons in hand you can cut Nathan's complacency to the quick, and you will also

do him a great service. You will put him in a fury; he'll try to be calm, though inwardly fuming; but, all the same, you will enlighten a man of talent as to the peril in which he really stands; and you will also have the satisfaction of laming the horses of the *juste-milieu* in their stalls — But you are not listening to me, my dear."

"On the contrary, I am listening intently," she said. "I will tell you later why I feel desirous to know the truth of all this."

"You shall know it," said Vandenesse. "If you stay masked I will take you to supper with Nathan and Florine; it would be rather amusing for a woman of your rank to fool an actress after bewildering the wits of a clever man about these important facts; you can harness them both to the same hoax. I'll make some inquiries about Nathan's infidelities, and if I discover any of his recent adventures you shall enjoy the sight of a courtesan's fury; it is magnificent. Florine will boil and foam like an Alpine torrent; she adores Nathan; he is everything to her; she clings to him like flesh to the bones or a lioness to her cubs. I remember seeing, in my youth, a celebrated actress (who wrote like a scullion) when she came to a friend of mine to demand her letters. I have never seen such a sight again, such calm fury, such insolent majesty, such savage self-control — Are you ill, Marie?"

"No; they have made too much fire." The countess turned away and threw herself on a sofa. Suddenly, with an unforeseen movement, impelled by the horrible anguish of her jealousy, she rose on her trembling legs, crossed her arms, and came slowly to her husband.

"What do you know?" she asked. "You are not a man to torture me; you would crush me without making me suffer if I were guilty."

"What do you expect me to know, Marie?"

"Well! about Nathan."

"You think you love him," he replied; "but you love a phantom made of words."

"Then you know —"

"All," he said.

The word fell on Marie's head like the blow of a club.

"If you wish it, I will know nothing," he continued. "You are standing on the brink of a precipice, my child, and I must draw you from it. I have already done something. See!"

He drew from his pocket her letter of guarantee and the four notes endorsed by Schmucke, and let the countess recognize them; then he threw them into the fire.

"What would have happened to you, my poor Marie, three months hence?" he said. "The sheriffs would have taken you to a public court-room. Don't bow your head, don't feel humiliated; you have been the dupe of noble feelings; you have coquetted with poesy, not with a man. All women — all, do you hear me, Marie? — would have been seduced in your position. How absurd we should be, we men, we who have committed a thousand follies through a score of years, if we were not willing to grant you one imprudence in a lifetime! God keep me from triumphing over you or from offering you a pity you repelled so vehemently the other day. Perhaps that unfortunate man was

sincere when he wrote to you, sincere in attempting to kill himself, sincere in returning that same night to Florine. Men are worth less than women. It is not for my own sake that I speak at this moment, but for yours. I am indulgent, but the world is not; it shuns a woman who makes a scandal. Is that just? I know not; but this I know, the world is cruel. Society refuses to calm the woes itself has caused; it gives its honors to those who best deceive it; it has no recompense for rash devotion. I see and know all that. I can't reform society, but this I can do, I can protect you, Marie, against yourself. This matter concerns a man who has brought you trouble only, and not one of those high and sacred loves which do, at times, command our abnegation, and even bear their own excuse. Perhaps I have been wrong in not varying your happiness, in not providing you with gayer pleasures, travel, amusements, distractions for the mind. Besides, I can explain to myself the impulse that has driven you to a celebrated man, by the jealous envy you have roused in certain women. Lady Dudley, Madame d'Espard, and my sister-in-law Émilie count for something in all this. Those women, against whom I ought to have put you more thoroughly on your guard, have cultivated your curiosity more to trouble me and cause me unhappiness, than to fling you into a whirlpool which, as I believe, you would never have entered."

As she listened to these words, so full of kindness, the countess was torn by many conflicting feelings; but the storm within her breast was ruled by one of them,—a keen admiration for her husband. Proud and

noble souls are prompt to recognize the delicacy with which they are treated. Tact is to sentiments what grace is to the body. Marie appreciated the grandeur of the man who bowed before a woman in fault, that he might not see her blush. She ran from the room like one beside herself, but instantly returned, fearing lest her hasty action might cause him uneasiness.

"Wait," she said, and disappeared again.

Félix had ably prepared her excuse, and he was instantly rewarded for his generosity. His wife returned with Nathan's letters in her hand, and gave them to him.

"Judge me," she said, kneeling down beside him.

"Are we able to judge where we love?" he answered, throwing the letters into the fire; for he felt that later his wife might not forgive him for having read them. Marie, with her head upon his knee, burst into tears.

"My child," he said, raising her head, "where are your letters?"

At this question the poor woman no longer felt the intolerable burning of her cheeks; she turned cold.

"That you may not suspect me of calumniating a man whom you think worthy of you, I will make Florine herself return you those letters."

"Oh! Surely he would give them back to me himself."

"Suppose that he refused to do so?"

The countess dropped her head.

"The world disgusts me," she said. "I don't want to enter it again. I want to live alone with you, if you forgive me."

"But you might be bored again. Besides, what would the world say if you left it so abruptly? In the spring we will travel; we will go to Italy, and all over Europe; you shall see life. But to-morrow night we must go to the Opera-ball; there is no other way to get those letters without compromising you; besides, by giving them up, Florine will prove to you her power."

"And must I see that?" said the countess, frightened.

"To-morrow night."

The next evening, about midnight, Nathan was walking about the foyer of the Opera with a mask on his arm, to whom he was attending in a sufficiently conjugal manner. Presently two masked women came up to him.

"You poor fool! Marie is here and is watching you," said one of them, who was Vandenesse, disguised as a woman.

"If you choose to listen to me I will tell you secrets that Nathan is hiding from you," said the other woman, who was the countess, to Florine.

Nathan had abruptly dropped Florine's arm to follow the count, who adroitly slipped into the crowd and was out of sight in a moment. Florine followed the countess, who sat down on a seat close at hand, to which the count, doubling on Nathan, returned almost immediately to guard his wife.

"Explain yourself, my dear," said Florine, "and don't think I shall stand this long. No one can tear Raoul from me, I'll tell you that; I hold him by habit, and that's even stronger than love."

"In the first place, are you Florine?" said the count, speaking in his natural voice.

"A pretty question! if you don't know that, my joking friend, why should I believe you?"

"Go and ask Nathan, who has left you to look for his other mistress, where he passed the night, three days ago. He tried to kill himself without a word to you, my dear, — and all for want of money. That shows how much you know about the affairs of a man whom you say you love, and who leaves you without a penny, and kills himself, — or, rather, does n't kill himself, for he misses it. Suicides that don't kill are about as absurd as a duel without a scratch."

"That's a lie," said Florine. "He dined with me that very day. The poor fellow had the sheriff after him; he was hiding, as well he might."

"Go and ask at the *hôtel du Mail*, rue du Mail, if he was not taken there that morning, half dead of the fumes of charcoal, by a handsome young woman with whom he has been in love over a year. Her letters are at this moment under your very nose in your own house. If you want to teach Nathan a good lesson, let us all three go there; and I'll show you, papers in hand, how you can save him from the sheriff and Clichy if you choose to be the good girl that you are."

"Try that on others than Florine, my little man. I am certain that Nathan has never been in love with any one but me."

"On the contrary, he has been in love with a woman in society for over a year —"

"A woman in society, he!" cried Florine. "I don't trouble myself about such nonsense as that."



"Well, do you want me to make him come and tell you that he will not take you home from here to-night."

"If you can make him tell me that," said Florine, "I'll take *you* home, and we'll look for those letters which I shall believe in when I see them, and not till then. He must have written them while I slept."

"Stay here," said Félix, "and watch."

So saying, he took the arm of his wife and moved to a little distance. Presently, Nathan, who had been hunting up and down the foyer like a dog looking for its master, returned to the spot where the mask had addressed him. Seeing on his face an expression he could not conceal, Florine placed herself like a post in front of him, and said, imperiously:—

"I don't wish you to leave me again; I have my reasons for this."

The countess then, at the instigation of her husband, went up to Raoul and said in his ear, —

"Marie. Who is this woman? Leave her at once, and meet me at the foot of the grand staircase."

In this difficult extremity Raoul dropped Florine's arm, and though she caught his own and held it forcibly, she was obliged, after a moment, to let him go. Nathan disappeared into the crowd.

"What did I tell you?" said Félix in Florine's astonished ears, offering her his arm.

"Come," she said; "whoever you are, come. Have you a carriage here?"

For all answer, Vandenesse hurried Florine away, followed by his wife. A few moments later the three

masks, driven rapidly by the Vandenesse coachman, reached Florine's house. As soon as she had entered her own apartments the actress unmasked. Madame de Vandenesse could not restrain a quiver of surprise at Florine's beauty as she stood there choking with anger, and superb in her wrath and jealousy.

"There is, somewhere in these rooms," said Vandenesse, "a portfolio, the key of which you have never had; the letters are probably in it."

"Well, well, for once in my life I am bewildered; you know something that I have been uneasy about for some days," cried Florine, rushing into the study in search of the portfolio.

Vandenesse saw that his wife was turning pale beneath her mask. Florine's apartment revealed more about the intimacy of the actress and Nathan than any ideal mistress would wish to know. The eye of a woman can take in the truth of such things in a second, and the countess saw vestiges of Nathan which proved to her the certainty of what Vandenesse had said. Florine returned with the portfolio.

"How am I to open it?" she said.

The actress rang the bell and sent into the kitchen for the cook's knife. When it came she brandished it in the air, crying out in ironical tones:—

"With this they cut the necks of *poulets*."

The words, which made the countess shiver, explained to her, even better than her husband had done the night before, the depths of the abyss into which she had so nearly fallen.

"What a fool I am!" said Florine; "his razor will do better."

She fetched one of Nathan's razors from his dressing-table, and slit the leather cover of the portfolio, through which Marie's letters dropped. Florine snatched one up hap-hazard, and looked it over.

"Yes, she must be a well-bred woman. It looks to me as if there were no mistakes in spelling here."

The count gathered up the letters hastily and gave them to his wife, who took them to a table as if to see that they were all there.

"Now," said Vandenesse to Florine, "will you let me have those letters for these?" showing her five bank-bills of ten thousand francs each. "They'll replace the sums you have paid for him."

"Ah!" cried Florine, "did n't I kill myself body and soul in the provinces to get him money,— I, who'd have cut my hand off to serve him? But that's men! damn your soul for them and they'll march over you rough-shod! He shall pay me for this!"

Madame de Vandenesse was disappearing with the letters.

"Hi! stop, stop, my fine mask!" cried Florine; "leave me one to confound him with."

"Not possible," said Vandenesse.

"Why not?"

"That mask is your ex-rival; but you need n't fear her now."

"Well, she might have had the grace to say thank you," cried Florine.

"But you have the fifty thousand francs instead," said Vandenesse, bowing to her.

It is extremely rare for young men, when driven to suicide, to attempt it a second time if the first fails.

When it does n't cure life, it cures all desire for voluntary death. Raoul felt no disposition to try it again when he found himself in a more painful position than that from which he had just been rescued. He tried to see the countess and explain to her the nature of his love, which now shone more vividly in his soul than ever. But the first time they met in society, Madame de Vandenesse gave him that fixed and contemptuous look which at once and forever puts an impassable gulf between a man and a woman. In spite of his natural assurance, Nathan never dared, during the rest of the winter, either to speak to the countess or even approach her.

But he opened his heart to Blondet; to him he talked of his Laura and his Beatrice, apropos of Madame de Vandenesse. He even made a paraphrase of the following beautiful passage from the pen of Théophile Gautier, one of the most remarkable poets of our day: —

“ ‘ Ideala, flower of heaven's own blue, with heart of gold, whose fibrous roots, softer, a thousandfold, than fairy tresses, strike to our souls and drink their purest essence; flower most sweet and bitter! thou canst not be torn away without the heart's blood flowing, without thy bruised stems sweating with scarlet tears. Ah! cursèd flower, why didst thou grow within my soul? ’ ”

“My dear fellow,” said Blondet, “you are raving. I'll grant it was a pretty flower, but it was n't a bit ideal, and instead of singing like a blindman before an empty niche, you had much better wash your hands and make submission to the powers. You are too much of an artist ever to be a good politician; you

have been fooled by men of not one-half your value. Think about being fooled again — but elsewhere.”

“Marie cannot prevent my loving her,” said Nathan; “she shall be my Beatrice.”

“Beatrice, my good Raoul, was a little girl twelve years of age when Dante last saw her; otherwise, she would not have been Beatrice. To make a divinity, it won’t do to see her one day wrapped in a mantle, and the next with a low dress, and the third on the boulevard, cheapening toys for her last baby. When a man has Florine, who is in turn duchess, bourgeoisie, negress, marquise, colonel, Swiss peasant, virgin of the sun in Peru (only way she can play the part), I don’t see why he should go rambling after fashionable women.”

Du Tillet, to use a Bourse term, *executed* Nathan, who, for lack of money, gave up his place on the newspaper; and the celebrated man received but five votes in the electoral college where the banker was elected.

When, after a long and happy journey in Italy, the Comtesse de Vandenesse returned to Paris late in the following winter, all her husband’s predictions about Nathan were justified. He had taken Blondet’s advice and negotiated with the government, which employed his pen. His personal affairs were in such disorder that one day, on the Champs-Élysées, Marie saw her former adorer on foot, in shabby clothes, giving his arm to Florine. When a man becomes indifferent to the heart of a woman who has once loved him, he often seems to her very ugly, even horrible, especially when he resembles Nathan. Madame de Vandenesse had a sense of personal humiliation in the thought that she

had once cared for him. If she had not already been cured of all extra-conjugal passion, the contrast then presented by the count to this man, grown less and less worthy of public favor, would have sufficed her.

To-day the ambitious Nathan, rich in ink and poor in will, has ended by capitulating entirely, and has settled down into a sinecure, like any other commonplace man. After lending his pen to all disorganizing efforts, he now lives in peace under the protecting shade of a ministerial organ. The cross of the Legion of honor, formerly the fruitful text of his satire, adorns his button-hole. "Peace at any price," ridicule of which was the stock-in-trade of his revolutionary editorship, is now the topic of his laudatory articles. Heredity, attacked by him in Saint-Simonian phrases, he now defends with solid arguments. This illogical conduct has its origin and its explanation in the change of front performed by many men besides Raoul during our recent political evolutions.



**A COMMISSION IN LUNACY.**





# A COMMISSION IN LUNACY.

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DEDICATED TO MONSIEUR LE CONTRE-AMIRAL BAZOCHE,  
GOVERNOR OF THE ÎLE BOURBON.

BY THE GRATEFUL AUTHOR,

DE BALZAC.

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## I.

### TWO OLD FRIENDS.

IN 1828, about one o'clock in the morning, two men left a handsome house in the faubourg Saint-Honoré, not far from the Élysée-Bourbon. One was the celebrated doctor, Horace Bianchon; the other, one of the most elegant men in Paris, the Baron de Rastignac; friends of long standing. Each had sent away his carriage, and no cabs were to be seen in the faubourg; but the night was fine and the pavements were dry.

"Let us go on foot to the boulevard," said Eugène de Rastignac. "You'll find a cab at the club; they are always there till morning; and you can walk nearly home with me."

"Very good."

"Well, my dear fellow, what think you?"

"Of that woman?" asked the doctor, coldly.

"I recognize my Blanchon," cried Rastignac.

"How so?"

"You speak of the Marquise d'Espard as if she were a patient to put in your hospital."

"Do you want to know what I think, Eugène? I think that if you leave Madame de Nucingen for that marquise you'll exchange your one-eyed horse for a blind one."

"Madame de Nucingen is thirty-six years old."

"And the other woman thirty-three," replied the doctor, quickly.

"Her worst enemies call her twenty-six."

"My dear fellow, when you have an interest in knowing a woman's age look at her temples and the end of her nose. No matter what else women may do with their cosmetics, they can't alter those incorruptible witnesses to their agitated lives. Every year has left its stigmata there. When the temples of a woman look drawn, lined, faded in a certain way, when the tip of her nose has those little specks which resemble the 'blacks' that London showers down from her smoky chimneys where bituminous coal is burned, mark my words, that woman is over thirty. She may be handsome, she may be clever, she may be lovable, in short, anything you please, but she is over thirty, and has reached maturity. I don't blame those who attach themselves to such women; but a man as able as you ought not to take a winter apple for one of those sweet little pippins which smile from their branch and ask to be eaten. Love does n't go by registers, I know that; a man does n't love a woman because she

is of this or that age, because she is handsome or ugly, stupid or wise; he loves because he loves — ”

“Well, I love for very different reasons. She is Marquise d’Espard, born a Blamont-Chauvry, she is the fashion, she has spirit, she has feet as pretty as those of the Duchesse de Berry, she has something like a hundred thousand francs a year, and I may be able to marry her some day; at any rate, she will put me in a position where I can pay my debts.”

“I thought you were rich,” said Bianchon, interrupting him.

“Pooh! I have fifteen thousand francs a year — just what my stable costs me. I have been swindled, my dear fellow, in that affair of Monsieur de Nucingen, — I’ll tell you all about it some day. I have, however, married my sisters; that’s the greatest clear gain that I have made since the time when you and I were together at Madame Vauquer’s; and I’d rather see them well established than have a hundred thousand a year of my own. Now, what do you expect me to become? I am ambitious. What can Madame de Nucingen do for me in future? A year more and I shall be shelved like a married man. I have all the annoyances of married life and celibacy without the advantages of either. That’s the false position every man gets into when he is tied too long to the same apron-strings.”

“Do you really think you’ll better yourself here?” said Bianchon. “Your marquise, my dear fellow, does n’t please me at all.”

“Those liberal opinions of yours affect your sight. If Madame d’Espard were a Madame Rabourdin — ”

"My dear friend, be she noble or bourgeoisie, she will always be without a soul, the most consummate type of selfishness. Believe me, physicians are accustomed to judge of men and women; the ablest of us can probe the soul while probing the body. In spite of that charming boudoir in which you and I have just passed the evening, in spite of the luxury of that house, it is more than probable that Madame la marquise is in debt."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't say it is so, I merely suppose it. She talked of her soul as the late King Louis XVIII. used to talk of his heart. Now listen to me; that frail little fair woman with chestnut hair, who complains of weakness for the sake of being pitied, is really in the enjoyment of iron health, has the appetite of a wolf, the strength and treachery of a tiger. Never was gauze, silk, muslin more cleverly twisted round — a Lie. *Ecco!*"

"You frighten me, Bianchon. You must have learned a good deal of life since the old-days at Madame Vauquer's."

"Yes, since then, my dear boy, I've seen dolls, puppets, and marionettes! I know something of the manners and morals of fine ladies. We doctors spend ourselves, our time and strength, to save their beauty from the slightest injury; we succeed, we keep their secret as if we were dead, and they send for our bills and squabble over them! Who saved them? oh, simply nature! Far from praising us professionally, they'll say evil of us, fearing lest their friends should employ us. My dear Eugène, these very women whom

you think angels I have seen stripped of all the little graces with which they cover up their souls; I've seen them without the rags that conceal their imperfections; without manners, without corset, even, and I tell you they are not beautiful! We began, you and I, by seeing various pools and much filth under the surface of society when we were stranded on that rock at Vauquer's, but what we then saw was nothing, nothing! Since I have gone much among the upper classes I've met monsters dressed in satin, Michonneaus in white gloves, Poirêts glittering with crosses, great lords better at usury than old Gobseck himself. Often, when I have been called upon to lend a helping hand to virtue, I have found it, to the shame of manhood I say it, shivering in a garret, pursued by calumny, keeping body and soul together on a paltry stipend, and called a fool or crazy, an original or a brute. My dear Eugène, your marquise is a fashionable woman, and it is precisely those women whom I hold in horror. Do you want to know why? A woman of high mind, pure taste, gentle spirit, a heart well filled, and who leads a simple life, has not the smallest chance of becoming fashionable. Draw your own conclusions. A fashionable woman and a man in power are analogous, but with this difference: the qualities by which a man rises above his fellows make him the greater personage and are to his honor; whereas the qualities by which a woman attains to her empire of a day are vices; she perverts her nature to hide her real self; and to lead the life militant of fashion she needs a constitution of iron under a semblance of fragility. As a doctor I know that a good

stomach precludes a good heart. Your fashionable woman has no feelings; her fury for pleasure is caused by the desire to warm up her frigid nature; she wants emotions and enjoyments like an old man who hangs about the stairway of the Opera-house. Having more head than heart, she sacrifices true emotions and friends to her personal triumph, just as a general sends his most devoted lieutenants to win a battle. A fashionable woman is no longer a woman; she is neither mother, wife, nor mistress; her sex is in her brain, medically speaking. Your marquise has all the symptoms of her worldliness, — the beak of a bird of prey, a cold light eye and honeyed speech; she is as polished as a steel spring; she stirs everything except the heart."

"There is some truth in what you say, Bianchon."

"Some truth!" exclaimed Bianchon; "it is all true. Do you think I wasn't conscious of the insulting politeness by which she made me feel the imaginary distance her nobility puts between us; or that I did n't feel a deep pity for her catlike fawning as I thought of its object? A year from now she would n't lift her finger to do me the smallest service, but to-night she has loaded me with gracious smiles, thinking that I can influence my uncle Popinot, on whom the success of her suit against her husband depends."

"My dear boy, would you rather she had taken no notice of you? I admit your philippic against fashionable women; but all that's beside the question. I should, under any circumstances, prefer a Marquise d'Espard to the most retiring, modest young creature on earth. Marry an angel, indeed! and go and bury

your happiness in the country! The wife of a public man ought to be a government machine, a mechanism of fine compliments woven of silk and gold; she is the first and most faithful instrument of an ambitious man; she's a friend who can compromise herself without danger, and whose actions he can always disavow. Suppose Mohammed in Paris in the nineteenth century! His wife would infallibly be a Rohan, a Duchesse de Chevreuse, refined and flattering as an ambassadress, wily as Figaro. Your loving woman leads to nothing; a fashionable woman leads everywhere; she is the diamond with which a man can cut out windows when he has not the golden key to open doors. To the burgher the burgher virtues; to the man of ambition the vices of ambitious men. Besides, my dear fellow, don't you know that the love of a Duchesse de Langeais or de Maufrigneuse or Lady Dudley means untold pleasure? If you only knew how the cold reserve of such women gives value to the slightest sign of their regard! — what joy to see the purple of a violet peeping beneath the snow! A smile flickering behind a fan contradicts the conventional reserve, and is worth all the artless demonstrations of your loving bourgeoisie. Moreover, a woman of the world, a Blamont-Chauvry, has virtues after her kind. Her virtues are power, fortune, splendor, and a certain contempt for all that is beneath her — ”

“Thank you,” said Bianchon.

“Old Boniface!” replied Rastignac, laughing. “Come, don't be commonplace; follow the example of your friend Desplein; get yourself made a baron, a knight of the Order of Saint-Michel, become a peer of France, and marry your daughters to dukes.”



"I! may all the devils of hell —"

"La! la! have you no superiority except that of doctoring? I declare I pity you."

"I hate such people; I want a revolution to get rid of them."

"Then, my old lancet of a Robespierre, do you mean to say you won't go and see your uncle Popinot to-morrow?"

"I don't say anything of the kind," replied Bianchon; "when the matter concerns you I'd fetch water from hell —"

"Dear friend, you touch my heart. I've sworn that the marquis shall be proved a lunatic —"

"But," continued Horace, "I don't promise to succeed to the extent you wish with Jean-Jules Popinot; you don't know him. But I do promise to bring him to see your marquise the day after to-morrow; she may get the better of him if she can. I doubt it. All the kingdoms of the world, all the duchesses, all the knives of all the guillotines might be brought to bear, the king might offer him a peerage, the good God might promise him the freedom of paradise and the revenues of purgatory, and not one of all those powers could make him swerve one hair's-breadth in doing his duty. He is a judge as death is death."

By this time the two friends had reached the ministry of Foreign Affairs at the corner of the Boulevard des Capucines.

"There's your home," said Bianchon, laughing, as he nodded toward the building, "and here's my carriage," summoning a cab. "The future of both is foreshadowed."

"You'll always be happy in the depths of your pond; whereas I shall keep struggling on the surface with winds and waves until forced to go under; and then I'll come and beg a place in your grotto, old fellow."

"Saturday, then," said Bianchon.

"Agreed," replied Eugène; "you promise to bring Popinot?"

"Yes, I will do all that my conscience allows me to do. Perhaps this petition hides some little *dramo-rama*, as we used to say in the good old struggling days."

"Poor Bianchon! he'll never be anything but a worthy man," thought Rastignac, as the cab rolled away.

"Rastignac has saddled me with the hardest of all negotiations," thought Bianchon, when he woke the next morning, and remembered his promise. "But I have never in my life asked my uncle for the slightest service at the Palais, though I've paid more than a thousand visits for him gratis. Well, anyhow, he won't trouble himself; he'll say yes or no, and there'll be the end of it."

After this little monologue, the celebrated doctor started at seven in the morning for the rue du Fouarre, where lived Monsieur Jean-Jules Popinot, judge of one of the Lower Courts of the department of the Seine.

The rue du Fouarre, a name which formerly signified rue du Paille, was the most important street in Paris in the thirteenth century. There were the Schools of the University where the voice of Abélard and that of Gerson echoed through the world of knowledge. It is

to-day the dirtiest street in the twelfth arrondissement, the poorest quarter of Paris, where two-thirds of the population lack wood in winter, and from which more waifs are cast at the doors of the Foundling Hospital, more patients are sent to the Hôtel-Dieu, more beggars fill the streets, more rag-pickers rake in the gutters, more miserable old men creep along on the sunny side of walls, more workmen out of work hang about the street-corners, more prisoners are taken to the police-courts than in any other quarter of Paris. About the middle of this street, which is always damp, for its gutter conveys to the Seine the blackened water of several dye-houses, stands an old building, restored, no doubt, in the days of François I., built of brick, supported by courses and copings of freestone. Its solidity is proclaimed by an external shape which is not unusual in certain very ancient houses in Paris. It has, if we may be allowed to say so, a sort of stomach, produced by the bulging of its first floor under the weight of the second and third floors, although itself supported by the strong stone wall of the ground-floor. At first sight it looks as if the mullions of the windows, although held by strong stone casings, were about to crack in two; but an observer will not fail to note that this old house has one characteristic in common with the Tour de Boulogne, — the old bricks and the worn old stones preserve, rigidly, their centre of gravity.

Like all houses built before the invention of carriages, the arch of the gateway is very low and resembles the entrance to a prison. If on a rainy day some pedestrian should take shelter beneath its low-vaulted

roof with projecting whitewashed beams, he could not fail to observe the picture presented by the interior regions of this dwelling. To the left is a tiny square garden, which allows of only four steps in all directions, — a garden of black earth, with trellises without vines, where, in default of vegetation, lie the shadows of two trees, heaps of papers, old linen, plaster and other rubbish fallen from the roof; a barren scrap of ground, indeed, where time has cast, on its surrounding walls, on the trunks of the trees and their branches, a powdery something that resembles soot. Two arcades are on the garden side; two others are opposite to the porte-cochère; and through them can be seen the wooden stairway which leads up to the apartments, the baluster of which is a marvel of iron-work; so fantastic were the prevailing shapes at the period when it was wrought. The worn-out stairs now tremble at every step.

The casings of the doors of each apartment are brown with dirt and grease and dust, and the doors themselves are double and covered with Utrecht velvet studded with tarnished nails arranged in lozenge form. These remains of splendor prove that in the days of Louis XIV. the house was inhabited by some councillor to the parliament, or rich ecclesiastic, or perhaps by the treasurer of a bureau of perquisites. Such vestiges of former splendor bring a smile to our lips by a naïve contrast of the present with the past. Monsieur Jean-Jules Popinot lived on the first floor of this house, where the usual obscurity of first floors in Parisian houses was increased by the narrowness of the street. This old dwelling was known throughout

the length and breadth of the twelfth arrondissement; a region for which Divine Providence had provided this magistrate as it provides a beneficent plant or herb to heal or alleviate every disease. Here follows a sketch of this personage, whom the brilliant Marquise d'Espard was now desirous of seducing.



## II.

## THE JUDGE ILL-JUDGED.

IN his capacity as magistrate, Monsieur Popinot was always clothed in black; a peculiarity which contributed to make him ridiculous in the eyes of persons who are in the habit of judging all things superficially. Men who seek to maintain their dignity by such clothing ought, undoubtedly, to subject themselves to minute and continual care of it; but this dear Monsieur Popinot was absolutely incapable of producing upon himself the puritanical neatness which the wearing of black demands. His trousers, always shabby, seemed of the stuff called *voile*, of which barristers' gowns are made; and long usage had produced such innumerable creases that in certain places white or red or shiny stripes appeared, revealing either sordid avarice or abject poverty. His coarse woollen socks grinned from the sides of his misshapen shoes. His linen had that rusty look caused by long lying-by in drawers and wardrobes, — proving that the late Madame Popinot was afflicted with the linen mania; true, no doubt, to Flemish customs, the family washing was probably done but twice a year. The coat and waistcoat of the excellent magistrate were in keeping with his trousers, shoes, stockings, and linen. He had the luck of his slovenliness; for whenever it

came to pass that he bought a new coat he conformed it to the rest of his apparel by getting it spotted with inexplicable promptitude. The goodman waited for his cook to tell him of the shabbiness of his hat before he got another. His cravat was always awry, and never did he straighten his crumpled shirt-collar when his judge's bands had set it askew. He took no care of his grizzled hair, and seldom shaved more than twice a week. He never wore gloves, but rammed his hands habitually into his pockets, the openings to which, always dirty and nearly always torn, added one feature more to the general neglect of his person.

Whoso has frequented the Palais de justice in Paris, a place where all varieties of black garments may be observed, can readily picture to his mind's eye the appearance of Monsieur Popinot. The habit of being seated all day long affects the body to a great degree, just as the tedium of listening to interminable pleadings affects the physiognomy of magistrates. Shut up in ridiculously narrow rooms, without dignity of architecture, where the air is soon vitiated, the Parisian judge is forced to acquire a frowning visage, puckered by listening and saddened by ennui; his skin gets sickly and takes on a greenish or an earthy tint, according to the temperament of the individual. In fact, the most blooming young man would become, within a given time, a pale machine, a mechanism applying the Code to all sorts of cases with the phlegm of a clock's mainspring.

If, therefore, Nature had not endowed Monsieur Popinot with an agreeable exterior, the magistracy had certainly not embellished it. His bony frame

presented knotty joints. His big knees, his large feet, his large hands contrasted oddly with a sacerdotal face, vaguely resembling a calf's head, gentle to insipidity, poorly lighted by whitish green eyes, drained of its blood, divided in two by a long flat nose, surmounted by a forehead without intellectual protuberance, and flanked by a pair of enormous ears which flopped gracelessly.

One sole feature made this face acceptable to a physiognomist. The lips of the man's mouth expressed a kindness that was well-nigh divine. They were thick red lips with countless creases; they were mobile, they curved, and on them nature had imprinted the noblest sentiments. They were lips that spoke to the heart and revealed in this old man clearness of mind, the gift of second-sight, and an angelic spirit; therefore you would ill have judged him had you done so only by his retreating forehead, his eyes without warmth, and his pitiable appearance. His life corresponded to his countenance; it was worn by incessant toil, and it covered the virtues of a saint.

His great legal acquirements had made him so well known that when Napoleon reorganized the whole system of law in 1806 and 1811, Popinot was, on the advice of Cambacérès, among the first to be appointed judge of the Imperial court of Paris. Popinot was no intriguer. At each new crisis, each new demand for office, the ministry set Popinot aside in favor of more exacting claims; for the good man never set foot in the houses of the arch-chancellor or the chief-justice. He was gradually shoved aside on all lists for promotion by the more active and pushing men; until,



finally, he was made a substitute judge. Then a general outcry arose at the Palais: "Popinot a substitute judge!" The injustice of the act struck the whole legal world, barristers, solicitors, clerks, everybody, except Popinot himself, who made no complaint of it. The first clamor over, every one came to think that, on the whole, it was for the best in this best of all possible worlds, — which, certainly, must be the legal world.

Popinot continued to be a substitute judge until the day came when a distinguished Keeper of the Seals, during the Restoration, avenged the wrong done to the modest, silent man by the great officers of the Empire. After being a substitute judge for a dozen years, Monsieur Popinot was, no doubt, fated to die in the subordinate position of an examining judge in one of the Lower courts of the Seine.

To explain the obscure fate of one of the most superior men the bench has ever known, it is necessary to enter into certain considerations which will serve to explain his life and character, and will also reveal something of the running-gear of that great machine called the Law. Monsieur Popinot was rated by three successive presidents of the Seine courts in a category of *judgery*, the only word that expresses the idea we desire to convey. He did not obtain from any of them the reputation for capacity which his work had already deserved. Just as a painter is relegated into a certain category — that of landscape, portrait, historical, marine, or genre painting — by the public of artists, connoisseurs, and ninnies, who, out of envy or critical omnipotence or prejudice, barricade him in

his own intellect, so Popinot was given his limits, and was hemmed in to them.

Judges, barristers, and lawyers, generally, all those who pasture on judicial territory, recognize two elements to every cause: legality and equity. Equity derives from facts alone, legality is the application of principles to facts. A man may be right in equity, and wrong legally, without blame to the judge for his decision. Between the man's consciousness and his act, there is a mass of determining reasons unknown to the judge, but which, in fact, condemn or legitimize an act. A judge is not God: his duty is to adapt facts to principles; to judge them in infinite variety by the application of one test. If the judge had the power of reading consciences and discerning motives so as to render absolutely just judgments, he would be the greatest of men. France employs about six thousand judges; no generation has six thousand great men at her service.

Popinot, in the centre of Parisian civilization, was a very able *cadi*, who, by the constitution of his mind, and by dint of rubbing the letter of the law into the spirit of the facts, had come to see the great defect of arbitrary applications. Aided by his strong judicial second-sight, he pierced through the double layer of falsehood with which a legal advocate hides the real kernel of a case. A judge in the same sense that the great Desplein was a surgeon, he could penetrate a conscience as Desplein saw into a body. His life and his morals had led him to an exact appreciation of the most secret thoughts through his scrutiny of acts. He burrowed into a case as Cuvier burrowed

into the soil of the globe. Like that great thinker, he went from deduction to deduction before he drew conclusions, and reproduced the past of a conscience as Cuvier reconstructed an anoplotherium. Apropos of a decision, he would often wake up in the night, roused suddenly by some ray of truth which darted vividly into his mind. Struck with the deep injustice which frequently ends a legal struggle, in which so much is to the scoundrel's profit, and so little serves an honest man, he often gave a judgment in favor of equity rather than legality in cases where the question admitted of intuition. Consequently his colleagues regarded him as unpractical; besides, his reasons, stated at great length, prolonged their deliberations. When Popinot discovered their unwillingness to listen to him he took pains to give his opinion more briefly. He was said to be a bad judge of all affairs into which equity could enter, but as his genius of appreciation was very striking, his judgment lucid, his penetration deep, he was considered to possess a special aptitude for the laborious duties of an examining judge. Thus it was that he remained during the greater part of his judicial career in that capacity.

Although his qualifications made him eminently fitted for that arduous office, yet the kindness of his heart kept him ever on the rack; he was constantly held as in a vice between his conscience and his pity. The functions of an examining judge, though better paid than those of a civil judge, tempt no one, for they are too confining. Popinot, modest, virtuous, without ambition and indefatigable, never complained; he made the sacrifice of his own tastes, his own tender-

heartedness to the public good, and allowed himself to be kept down to the slavery of criminal law, where, indeed, he contrived to be both just and beneficent. Sometimes his usher would secretly give a prisoner the money to buy tobacco or get a warm garment for winter, as he led the man back from the judge's office to the Souricière, — the strong room at the Palais, where the prisoners waited until the judges were ready to examine them.

Popinot knew the secret of being an inflexible judge and a merciful man. Consequently, no one was able to obtain confessions as easily as he, without having recourse to the judicial wiles of an examining judge. He had, besides, the shrewdness of an observer. This man, almost silly in countenance, simple and absent-minded, was able to detect the wildest schemes of the Crispins of the galleys; he could foil the most astute of wantons, and melt the heart of the veriest scoundrel. Circumstances that are quite uncommon had sharpened his natural perspicacity; but in order to state them, it is necessary to glance into his private life, for his character as a judge was exercised solely on the social and outward side of him; within was another man, grander, and little known.

Twelve years before this present history begins, in 1816, during the terrible famine which coincided fatally with the stay of the so-called Allies in France, Popinot was appointed president of a special committee instituted to distribute relief to the starving people of his quarter, at the very moment when he was planning to leave the rue du Fouarre, a place of residence as displeasing to himself as to his wife.

The great lawyer, the expert criminal judge, whose very superiority seemed to his colleagues weakness, had, for the last five years, observed the results of judicial action without studying their causes. But now, as he climbed to garrets and came face to face with poverty, as he studied the hard necessities which gradually brought the poor and suffering to wrong actions, and took the measure of their bitter griefs, he was seized with compassion. The upright judge became, henceforth, the Saint Vincent de Paul of those grown children, those suffering workmen.

His transformation did not at once attain to wisdom. Benevolence has its moments of rashly yielding to temptation like vice. Charity can empty the purse of a saint, as roulette absorbs the property of a gambler. Popinot went from one misfortune to another, bestowing alms on the right hand and on the left; then, after raising the rags which cover like a compress the fevered wound of that great public wretchedness, he became, at the end of a year, the providence of his quarter of the city. He was president, as we have said, of the committee of benevolence and the bureau of charity. Wherever gratuitous work was needed, there he toiled without pretension, like the "Man with the short cloak," who spent his life carrying soup to hungry families.

Popinot had the happiness, however, of acting in a higher sphere. He foresaw everything; he prevented crime; he provided work for those who were out of it; he placed the helpless where they were cared for; he distributed all succor with discernment; he made himself the adviser of the widow, the guardian of the fatherless, and the secret partner of many a little trade.

No one at the Palais or in Paris knew of this hidden life. There are virtues so dazzling that they are comfortable only in obscurity; those who practise them hasten to put their light under a bushel. As for the people whom he succored, they all, working by day and weary at night, made no talk of his kindness; ungrateful as children, who can never pay their debt of gratitude because they owe so much. There is such a thing as forced ingratitude. But what true heart ever sowed beneficence for the purpose of reaping gratitude, and of thinking its own deeds great?

After the second year of this secret apostleship, Popinot converted the ground-floor of his house into one large receiving-room, which was lighted by three windows with iron bars, opening on the street. The walls and ceiling of this large room were white-washed, and the furniture consisted of wooden benches like those in schools, a common closet, a walnut desk and an arm-chair. In the closet were the registers in which he kept the record of his cases, the blanks for his "bread tickets," and his day-book. He kept his books in a business manner, that he might not be the dupe of his own heart. All the poverty of the quarter was carefully registered, each case having its own account, like that of a customer on the books of a merchant. When he felt in doubt about a family, or an individual who applied for help, he had recourse to the police of the district. His servant, Lavienne, a man made for such a master, was his aide-de-camp. Lavienne released or renewed all articles in pawn; he visited the most poverty-stricken places and families while Popinot was busy at the Palais.

From four to seven o'clock in the morning in summer, and from six to nine in winter, the huge room on the ground-floor was crowded with women, children, and indigent persons, to whom Popinot gave audience. There was no need of a stove in winter, for the swarm of bodies created a stifling atmosphere. Lavienne, however, took the precaution to cover the damp floor with straw. By dint of constant usage the benches were as polished as varnished mahogany, and the walls, to a man's height, had received a coating of some unspeakable tint from the rags and dilapidated garments of these poor people. The unfortunate creatures were so attached to Popinot that when in the early morning they clustered about the door before it opened (the women trying to keep warm with their hands under their rags, the men by beating their arms), not a voice was raised above a whisper lest it might trouble his sleep.

The rag-pickers, that race of nocturnal beings, knew the house well, and often looked up to see the judge's window lighted at untimely hours. Thieves passing along the street would say to each other, "That's his house," and they respected it. The judge's day was divided as follows: the mornings belonged to the poor; the middle of the day to criminals; the evenings to judicial toil.

The genius of observation which characterized Popinot was therefore twofold in its application; he divined the virtues of poverty,—good feelings crushed, noble actions in embryo, self-devotions invisible,—just as he saw in the depths of consciences the faintest outlines of crime, the finest threads of delinquency.

Popinot's patrimony amounted to three thousand francs a year. His wife, sister to Horace Bianchon's father, a doctor at Sancerre, had brought him about twice as much. She had now been dead five years and had left all her property to her husband. As the salary of a substitute judge was not considerable, and Popinot had only become an examining judge within the last four years, it is easy to guess the cause of his parsimony in clothes and in all that concerned himself and own life, when we reflect on the smallness of his income and the greatness of his beneficence. Besides, taking another view of it, indifference in the matter of clothes is a distinctive mark of the higher knowledge, of art madly worshipped, of thought perpetually active. To complete this portrait it suffices to add that Popinot was one of the few judges of the courts of the Seine on whom the Legion of honor was not bestowed.

Such was the man whom the chief-justice of the Second Court, to which Popinot belonged, had appointed to make an examination into the condition of the Marquis d'Espard on a petition presented by the wife for a commission in lunacy.

The rue du Fouarre, where so many miserable creatures swarmed in the early mornings, became deserted after nine o'clock, resuming at that hour its usual gloomy and forlorn aspect. Bianchon therefore pressed his horse, wishing to come upon his uncle in the midst of his audience. He thought, not without a smile, of the singular contrast the judge would present to the salons of Madame d'Espard; and he resolved to persuade him into wearing clothes that should not seem absolutely ridiculous.



"I wonder if he has such a thing as a new coat," thought Bianchon, as he entered the rue du Fouarre, where the windows of the lower room were faintly lighted. "I think I had better consult Lavienne about it."

At the unwonted sound of wheels a dozen poor wretches came out on the steps, and pulled off their hats on seeing the doctor; for Bianchon, who treated his uncle's clients gratuitously, was almost as well known among them as the judge himself.

Bianchon now beheld his uncle in the middle of the room, the benches all around him swarming with paupers in the most grotesque singularities of costume; the sight of which would have filled the least artistic individual with delight and wonder. Certainly a Rembrandt, did any exist in our day, might have conceived from the sight of the silent misery artlessly posing there the noblest of compositions. Here the rugged face of a stern old man with a white beard and apostolic skull, presented a Saint Peter made to hand. His breast, partly uncovered, showed prominent muscles, indications of an iron constitution which had enabled him to bear so far an epic of sorrow. There a young woman suckling her last child to keep it from crying, was holding another, a boy about five years old, between her knees. Her breast, the whiteness of which was shining through her rags, the child with transparent skin, the brother whose attitude betrayed a future *gamin*, touched the soul of an onlooker by the sort of graceful contrast it offered to the long file of dreary faces reddened by the cold which surrounded this poor family. Farther

on, an old woman, pale and hard, presented that repulsive type of pauperism in revolt, ready to avenge itself in one day's riot for all its past misery. There, too, was the workman, young, debilitated, and out of work; whose intelligent eye showed faculties repressed by wants fought with hopelessly; silent about his sufferings, yet dying from lack of opportunity to break his way through the bars of that cage of misery where so many needs were swarming. Women were in the majority; the husbands, who had gone to their workshops, left their wives to plead the cause of their poor homes with that wit which characterizes the women of the people, who are nearly always queens in their hovel. On all those heads were seen torn foulards, on all those bodies mud-bedraggled skirts, frayed kerchiefs, dirty short-gowns, and eyes that shone like so many live flames. Horrible combination! the first sight of which inspired disgust, but presently caused a sort of terror, when it was seen that the humble resignation of these souls struggling against every want of life, was simply assumed as a means of speculation on benevolence. Two candles which lighted the vast room flickered in the sort of fog caused by the fetid atmosphere of this ill-ventilated place.

The judge was by no means the least picturesque person in this assemblage. On his head was a rusty cotton night-cap. As he wore no cravat, his neck, red with cold, and much wrinkled, rose sharply above the ragged collar of his old dressing-gown. His tired face bore the half-stupid expression of great preoccupation of mind. His mouth, in common with that of

most hard workers, was drawn together like a purse with its strings tied. His forehead, contracted by close attention, seemed to bear the weight of the confidences that were being made to him; he felt, analyzed, and judged them all. Attentive as a money-lender by "the little week," his eyes left the pages of his register to pierce to the inner being of the applicant, whom he examined with that rapidity of vision by which misers quiet their suspicions.

Standing behind his master, and ready to execute his orders, Lavienne was keeping order, receiving the new-comers and encouraging their timidity. When the doctor entered, a movement seemed to take place along the benches. Lavienne turned his head and was much surprised to see Bianchon.

"Ah! there you are, my boy," said Popinot, stretching out his hand. "What brings you here at this time of day?"

"I was afraid you might make a certain judicial visit about which I have come to talk, before I had a chance to see you."

"Well," resumed the judge, addressing himself to a stout little woman who was standing by, "if you don't tell me what the trouble is I can't guess it, my girl."

"Make haste," said Lavienne; "don't take other folks' time."

"Monsieur," said the woman at last, coloring high, and dropping her voice so that none but the judge and Lavienne should hear her. "I peddle fruit, and I owed for the board of my last baby, and so I was laying by my poor earnings —"

"Well, and your husband took them," said Popinot, divining the end of the confession.

"Yes, monsieur."

"What is your name?"

"La Pomponne."

"And your husband's?"

"Toupinet."

"Rue du Petit-Banquier?" continued Popinot, referring to the pages of his register. "He is in prison," he added, reading a remark written on the margin of a report of the case.

"For debt only, my dear monsieur."

Popinot nodded.

"But, monsieur, I have n't money enough to buy fruit for my barrow; and the landlord he came yesterday and forced me to pay him, or else be turned out into the street."

Lavienne stooped to his master and said a few words in his ear.

"Well, how much do you want to buy your fruit in the market?"

"Ah! my dear monsieur, I should want, to carry on my business, — yes, I should want, — at least ten francs."

The judge made a sign to Lavienne, who took the ten francs from a large bag and gave them to the woman, while the judge entered the loan upon one of his books. Seeing the thrill of joy that passed over the woman's whole body, Bianchon divined the anxiety with which the poor creature had doubtless come to the judge's house.

"Your turn," said Lavienne to the old man with the white beard.

Bianchon took the servant aside and asked how long these interviews were likely to last.

"Monsieur has seen a hundred persons already, and there are fifty more *to do*," said Lavienne. "Monsieur will have time to pay his first visits and return."

"My boy," said the judge, turning round and seizing Horace by the arms, "see; here are two addresses, not far from here, — one rue de Seine, the other rue de l'Arbalète. Just run round there, will you? Rue de Seine there's a young girl who has tried to smother herself; and you'll find, rue de l'Arbalète, a man who ought to go to your hospital. I'll wait breakfast for you."

Bianchon returned in about an hour. The rue du Fouarre was by that time deserted; day was dawning; his uncle was ready to go upstairs, for the last poor wretch whose misery he had lessened was just departing, and Lavienne's bag was empty.

"Well," said the judge, as they went upstairs, "how are they?"

"The man is dead," replied Bianchon; "the girl will pull through."

## III.

## THE PETITION.

EVER since the hand and eye of a wife had been lacking to the abode of Popinot, his apartments had assumed an appearance that was quite in keeping with that of their master. The slovenliness of the man lost in commanding thought had placed its grotesque seal on all things. Everywhere inveterate dust; everywhere that distortion of the use of things which may be noticed to some extent in all bachelor establishments, — documents in flower-vases, empty ink-bottles everywhere, forgotten plates, tinder-boxes converted into candlesticks in the hurry of a search, partial repairs and alterations, begun and never finished, leaving an encumbering mass of things in one place and barrenness in others, occasioned by spasmodic and futile attempts at putting things in order.

But the judge's study, more particularly the scene of this incessant disorder, bore witness to his pauseless activity, to the hurry of a man overwhelmed with business, pursued by ever increasing demands upon him. The book-shelves looked pillaged; the volumes were flung upon it; some on their backs with the pages open, others face down; legal documents and papers heaped in piles against the lower shelves

encumbered the floor; and the floor itself had not been rubbed for years.

The tables and other furniture were covered with votive offerings made to the judge by grateful poverty. Bouquets of artificial flowers, and paintings in which Popinot's initials were wreathed with hearts and *immortelles* decorated the walls. On a pair of blue crystal horns which adorned the chimney-piece were two glass globes within which were divers mingled colors, giving them the appearance of some curious product of nature. Here were oddly turned boxes, pretentiously made, of no possible use. There, were paper-weights and pen-holders made in the style of such work done at the galleys by convicts. These triumphs of patience, this trumpery of gratitude, these paper bouquets, gave to the judge's study and bedroom something the aspect of a toy-shop. The worthy soul made *mementos* of these works of art; he stuffed them with memoranda, disused pens, and little papers.

These sublime testimonials to divine charity were very dusty and, mostly, dilapidated. A few birds, well-stuffed, but eaten by maggots, stood up amid the forest of odds and ends in which the dominant object was the favorite angora of the late Madame Popinot, restored to a semblance of life by some penniless naturalist, who probably repaid by this eternal treasure a slender alms. An artist of the quarter, whose heart misled his brush, had painted the portraits of Monsieur and Madame Popinot. Lower in the scale of art were charcoal landscapes, paper crosses cut out in open-work patterns with incredible labor, and even embroidered pin-cushions.

The window-curtains were blackened with smoke, and the color of the draperies could no longer be distinguished. Between the fireplace in the study and the long table where the judge worked, the cook had served two cups of coffee on a small round stand. Two mahogany arm-chairs covered with horse-hair awaited the uncle and nephew. As the light, intercepted by the windows, did not as yet fill the room, the cook had also provided two tallow candles, the immeasurably long wicks of which, forming what are called toadstools, cast that lurid light which makes a candle last the longer by reason of its slow combustion, — a discovery due to misers.

“My dear uncle, you really ought to dress more warmly when you go down into that hall.”

“I don’t like to keep them waiting, those poor things. Well, what do you want of me?”

“I came to ask you to dine to-morrow with the Marquise d’Espard.”

“One of our relations?” asked the judge, with so innocently preoccupied an air that Bianchon burst out laughing.

“No, uncle; the Marquise d’Espard is a high and mighty dame who has presented a petition to your court, praying for a commission in lunacy on her husband, and you were appointed —”

“Do you expect me to go and dine with her? You are crazy!” said the judge, snatching up a copy of the statutes. “Here, read that article which forbids a judge from eating or drinking in the house of either party whose case he is to give judgment on. Let your marquise come and see me if she has any-



thing to say. Now I come to think of it, I'm to examine her husband after reading up the case to-night."

He rose, took a pile of documents from under a paper-weight, and said, after looking them over:—

"Here are the papers. As you take an interest in that high and mighty dame, let us read her petition."

Popinot crossed his dressing-gown over his breast, usually left bare by the flapping of that garment, and dipped a sop of bread into his cooling coffee, while he searched for the document in question, which he next proceeded to read, adding various parentheses and some discussions in which his nephew took part.

"'To the Chief Justice of the Second Court of the department of the Seine, in session at the Palais de Justice.

"'Madame Jeanne-Clémentine-Athenais de Blamont-Chauvry, wife of Monsieur Charles-Maurice-Marie-Andoche, Comte de Nègrepelisse, Marquis d'Espard' (Good nobility that), — 'the said dame d'Espard living on rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, No. 104, and the said Sieur d'Espard, rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, No. 22' (Ah, yes! the chief-justice told me it was in my quarter), — 'having Maître Desroches for her lawyer —'

"Desroches!" exclaimed the judge; "a mere pettifogger, a man not at all well thought of by either the court or his brother-lawyers; a man whose reputation injures his clients."

"Poor fellow!" said Bianchon. "I know him; he

is unluckily without means, and he behaves like a devil in the holy-water basin, that's all."

" — has the honor to state that, for the last year, the moral and intellectual faculties of Monsieur d'Espard, her husband, have undergone so serious a change that they have now brought him to the state of dementia and imbecility provided for by article 486 of the Civil Code, and require, for the protection of his fortune and person, and for the interests of his children whom he keeps with him, the application of the restraints named in said article.

" And, moreover, that the mental condition of Monsieur d'Espard, which for several years has given cause for serious anxiety as to his management of his business affairs, has lately fallen into a deplorable state of depression; that his will has felt the effects of this growing evil, and its weakness leaves Monsieur d'Espard exposed to all the dangers of incapacity, as shown by the following facts.

" For some time past the revenues derived from Monsieur d'Espard's landed estates have been paid by him, without plausible reasons or advantages, even temporary, to an old woman of repulsive appearance, named Madame Jeanrenaud, living sometimes in Paris, rue de la Vrillière, No. 8, and sometimes at Villeparisis, near Claye, department of the Seine et Marne, for the benefit of her son, aged thirty-six years, an officer of the ex-Imperial Guard, whom Monsieur d'Espard, by exerting his influence, has placed in the Royal Guard as major of the first regiment of cuirassiers. These persons, reduced, in 1814, to the

greatest poverty, have, since then, acquired possession of various pieces of valuable property, among them, and lately, a house in the Grande rue Verte, which the Sieur Jeanrenaud has fitted up at considerable cost, and where he now lives with the Dame Jeanrenaud, his mother, in pursuance of a project of marriage, which project, if consummated, will involve an expense of over one hundred thousand francs. This marriage has been procured by the proceedings of the Marquis d'Espard toward his banker, the Sieur Mongenod, whose niece he asked in marriage for the said Sieur Jeanrenaud, promising his influence to raise the latter to the dignity of baron. In fact, this elevation has already taken place through an ordinance of his Majesty, bearing date December 29 ultimo, given at the solicitation of the Marquis d'Espard, as could be proved by his Excellency the Keeper of the Seals, if the court thinks proper to obtain his testimony.

“ ‘ And, moreover, that there exists no reason, even among those which morality and the laws reprove, which can explain the ascendancy which the said widow Jeanrenaud has acquired over the mind of the Marquis d'Espard, or the singular interest which he takes in the said Baron Jeanrenaud, with whom, however, he holds little communication. Nevertheless, the control exercised by these two persons is so great that whenever they are in need of money — ’ ”

“ Hey! hey! ‘ reasons which morality and the laws reprove! ’ What does Desroches or his clerk mean to insinuate by that? ” said Popinot.

Bianchon laughed.

“ “ — the said dame, or her son, ” continued Popinot  
“ “ can obtain from the Marquis d’Espard, without discussion, whatever they ask; and in default of ready money Monsieur d’Espard often gives them notes negotiated by the Sieur Mongenod, who stands ready to give testimony thereto.

“ “ And, moreover, in addition to these facts, it appears that recently, when certain leases on the d’Espard estates were renewed, the farmers paid large sums for the continuation of said leases, which sums the said Sieur Jeanrenaud obtained for his own benefit.

“ “ And also, that the will of the Marquis d’Espard has so little to do with the payment of these sums that when spoken to on the subject he appears to know nothing about them; and whenever responsible parties have questioned him on his devotion to these two individuals his answers have indicated such complete abnegation of his own ideals and interests that there would seem to exist some mysterious cause underlying this affair, on which the petitioner desires to call down the eye of the law; because it is impossible that this secret cause should be other than criminal, improper, and extortionate, or else of a nature requiring the intervention of the medical officers of the law on this obsession, which passes the bounds of ordinary insanity and can only be characterized by the unusual term of *possession* — ”

“The devil!” cried Popinot; “what do you say to that, doctor? The statements here are very singular.”

"Possibly," replied Bianchon, "some effect of magnetic power."

"Do you believe in that nonsense of Mesmer's, — seeing through walls, and such stuff?"

"Yes, uncle," said the doctor, gravely. "As I listened to that petition the idea of such influence came into my mind. I declare to you that I have verified, in another sphere of action, facts analogous to these, which prove the unlimited control which one mind can obtain over another. I am, contrary to the opinion of my brother physicians, absolutely convinced of the power of the will, considered as a motor force. I have seen — setting aside all cases of collusion and charlatanism — the effects of this *possession*. Acts promised to the magnetizer by the magnetized person during sleep were scrupulously performed in the waking state. The will of one person can be made the will of another."

"In all kinds of acts?"

"Yes."

"Even criminal?"

"Even criminal."

"No one but you could make me listen to such talk."

"I'll let you witness the facts if you like," said Bianchon.

"Hum! hum!" muttered the judge. "Suppose that this pretended *possession* was really the cause of this affair, it would be difficult to produce and prove it in a court of law."

"I don't see any other means of seduction this Madame Jeanrenaud can have had, inasmuch as the

petition states that she is old and horribly ugly," said Bianchon.

"But," remarked the judge, "in 1814, the period at which this possession is stated to have been first observed, the woman must still have been young, and she may have been pretty, and so obtained by natural means, for herself as well as for her son, this empire over Monsieur d'Espard, which some men don't know how to evade. Such cause of 'possession,' as they call it, would be reprehensible in the eyes of the law, but it is explainable to the eyes of nature. Madame Jeanrenaud may have been angry at the Marquis d'Espard's marriage with Mademoiselle de Blamont-Chauvry, which probably took place about that time; and at the bottom of all this there may be nothing more than female rivalry."

"But, uncle, the woman is said to be repulsively ugly."

"The power of seduction," replied the judge, "is in direct proportion to repulsion — old question, that! Look at the small-pox, doctor. However, let's get on."

"Moreover, that since the year 1815, in order to obtain the sums demanded by these persons, the Marquis d'Espard has taken his two sons and gone to live in an apartment, rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, the commonness of which is unworthy of his name and fortune' (A man can live as he chooses): 'that he there brings up his two children, Comte Clément d'Espard, and the Vicomte d'Espard, in habits of life not in keeping with their rank and their future; that often the lack of money is such

that recently the owner of the house, a *Sieur Mariast*, seized the furniture for non-payment of rent; and when this execution was effected in his presence the *Marquis d'Espard* assisted the sheriff, whom he treated like a gentleman, showing him the courtesy and attention he might have paid to a person who was above him in rank —'

The uncle and nephew looked at each other and laughed.

“‘That, moreover, all the acts of the said *d'Espard's* life, besides those in relation to the widow *Jeanrenaud* and her son, the said *Baron Jeanrenaud*, are indicative of madness; that for the last ten years the said *d'Espard* has busied himself solely about China, its manners and customs and history; that he records and makes notes of Chinese habits; but, being questioned on these subjects, he confounds our present time and its events with the facts relative to China; that he censures the acts of our government and the conduct of the king (whom he used to love personally), comparing them with Chinese policy.

“‘That, furthermore, this monomania has driven the *Marquis d'Espard* into actions so devoid of reason that, against the habits of his station and the ideas he professed on the duties of nobility, he has undertaken a commercial enterprise for which he signs notes and contracts which involve both his honor and his fortune, inasmuch as they put upon him the obligations of a merchant, and may, in case of non-payment, lead to bankruptcy; that the said notes and contracts,

given and made with paper-makers, printers, lithographers, and others, who have furnished means of publication for his work (entitled "A picturesque History of China," now appearing in parts) are of such magnitude that the said paper-makers and others have applied to your petitioner, requesting her to ask for a commission in lunacy on the Marquis d'Espard, in order to protect their interests — "

"The man must be mad!" cried Bianchon.

"You think so, do you?" said Popinot. "Wait till you hear his side. He who listens to one bell hears but one sound."

"It seems to me — " began Bianchon.

"It seems to me," said the judge, "that if one of my relations wanted to lay hold of the management of my property, and if, instead of being a simple judge whose colleagues can tell from day to day whether he is sane or not, I were a duke and peer, any lawyer, let alone so sly a fellow as Desroches, could make out a case against me as good as that."

"That the education of his children is greatly impeded by this monomania; and that he instructs them, contrary to all principles of education, on those points of Chinese history which are directly opposed to the doctrines of the Catholic Church; and, moreover, that he teaches them to read and speak the Chinese dialect — "

"Pooh!" exclaimed Bianchon, "Desroches is getting absurd."



"The petition is drawn up by his head-clerk, Godeschal, whom you ought to know," said the judge.

"That he frequently leaves his said children without the common necessities; that your petitioner, in spite of her earnest entreaties, is not allowed to see them; that the *Sieur Marquis d'Espard* brings her said sons only once a year to visit her; that, knowing the privations to which they are subjected, she has attempted, but in vain, to convey to them some of the commonest necessities of life of which they are deprived —"

"Come, come, *Madame la marquise*, that's nonsense. Whoso proves too much proves nothing. My dear boy," said the judge, letting the petition drop upon his knees, "where's the mother who ever lacked courage, wit, and bowels of compassion to the point of dropping below the instincts of the lower animals? A mother would manage to get to her children and help them, as a lioness would to her cubs. If your *marquise* sincerely wants to feed or clothe her sons the devil himself could n't prevent it. That eel is too long for an old judge to swallow. Well, let's read the rest of it."

"That at the age which the said sons have now attained, it is essential that steps be taken to withdraw them from the fatal influence of such an education, that they be provided for according to their rank, and that the unhappy example of their father's conduct be no longer before their eyes.

“That in support of the facts here stated, proofs exist which the court can readily obtain. The monomania of the said d’Espard as to China has led him to call the justice of peace of the twelfth arrondissement a third-class mandarin, and the professors of the school of Henri IV. “pig-tails.” Apropos of the simplest matters he declares that things are not done so in China; in the course of an ordinary conversation he will mix up the affairs of Madame Jeanrenaud with events that happened in the reign of Louis XIV., all the while imagining, apparently, that he lives in China. Several of his neighbors, more particularly the Sieurs Edme Becker, medical student, and Jean-Baptiste Frémot, professor, residing in the same house as the Marquis d’Espard, are of opinion that this monomania on the subject of China is the result of a plan formed by the Baron Jeanrenaud and the widow, his mother, to destroy the remaining mental faculties of the said d’Espard; for the only service they appear to render is to procure and convey to him documents and facts relating to the empire of China.

“And finally, your petitioner offers to prove to the honorable court that the sums absorbed by the Sieur and widow Jeanrenaud between the years 1814 and 1828 amount to not less than one million of francs.

“In support of the foregoing facts your petitioner offers the testimony of persons who are in the habit of seeing the Marquis d’Espard daily, and whose names, residences, and occupations are hereunto annexed; several of whom have urged the petitioner to make this application as the sole means of withdrawing her children from this fatal influence and of rescuing the remnants of their property.

“ ‘ These considerations, together with the testimony hereunto annexed, proving, incontestably, the dementia and imbecility of the Marquis d’Espard herein named, described, and domiciled, your petitioner respectfully requests you to communicate to the king’s attorney-general; and your said petitioner further requests that you will appoint one of the judges of your court as commissioner to proceed to due inquiry into this case and to report on such day as you may be pleased to appoint, etc., etc.’ ”

“And here,” said Popinot, “is the order of the chief-justice appointing me. Well, what does your marquise want with me? I know all she has to say. I shall go to-morrow with my clerk and question the marquis; for the matter does n’t seem to me at all clear.”

“But look here, my dear uncle, I have never asked you the least little service connected with your judicial functions; well, now I do ask you to show to Madame d’Espard a kindness her situation seems to require. If she came here you would listen to her?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, go and listen to her in her own house. Madame d’Espard is a nervous, delicate woman, who would certainly be made ill by coming to this rat-hole of yours. Go there in the evening instead of dining with her, since the law forbids you to eat and drink with those who have cases in court.”

“Does n’t the law forbid you to receive legacies from your dead patients?” said Popinot, thinking he saw a tinge of sarcasm in his nephew’s remark.

"Come, uncle, if it is only to get at the truth of this affair, do as I ask you. You can go there as examining judge, to whom the matter, as stated in the petition, does not seem sufficiently clear. For my part, I should think it was quite as necessary to examine the marquise as her husband."

"You are right," said the judge; "she may be the crazy one, after all. I'll go."

"I'll come and fetch you. Write it in your notebook: *To-morrow night, nine o'clock, Madame d'Espard.* Good," said Bianchon, as he saw his uncle note it down.

## IV.

## THE MARQUISE D'ESPAUD.

THE next evening, at nine o'clock, Horace Bianchon mounted the dusty staircase of his uncle Popinot, whom he found toiling over the difficulties of a knotty case. The new coat which Lavienne had promised to procure from a tailor had not arrived; so that Popinot put on his shabby and spotted old garment and was the Popinot *incomptus* whose aspect was wont to excite a laugh on the lips of those to whom his life was unknown. Bianchon obtained permission, however, to tie his uncle's cravat and button up his coat, and in so doing he was able to conceal the worst spots by crossing the lappels from right to left, and so presenting a more respectable part of the cloth. Nevertheless, before long the judge had rucked up the coat, as usual, by his peculiar manner of ramming his hands into his pockets, so that being much wrinkled both before and behind, it formed a sort of hump in the middle of his back, producing, between the waistcoat and the trousers, a dissolution of continuity, — in other words, a gap through which his shirt appeared. Bianchon, to his sorrow, did not perceive this additional absurdity until the moment when his uncle was entering Madame d'Espaud's salon.

A slight sketch of the life of that lady is here necessary, in order to make the conference which Popinot was about to have with her intelligible to the reader.

Madame d'Espard had been for the last seven years one of the most fashionable women in Paris, where fashion lifts and drops, in turn, its votaries, who, now high, now low, that is to say, much considered and then forgotten, become, in the end, as obnoxious to fashion itself as a fallen minister or an exiled king. Her husband having left her about the year 1815, Madame d'Espard must have been married early in 1812. Her sons were fifteen and thirteen years of age, respectively. How came the mother of a family, thirty-three years of age, to be a leader of fashion? Though fashion is capricious, and no one can point in advance to its favorites, — for it often takes up the wife of a banker, or exalts some person of dubious beauty and elegance, — there would surely be something unnatural if it took no account whatever of age. In this instance fashion accepted Madame d'Espard as a young woman. She was thirty-three years old on the civil registers, and twenty-two in a salon.

But at the cost of what care, — what contrivances! Artificial curls concealed her temples. In her own apartments she doomed herself to live in a sort of twilight, pretending ill-health, in order to keep in the protecting shadow of curtains. Like Diane de Poitiers she used cold water for her bath; and, like Diane again, she slept on horse-hair, with morocco pillows to preserve her hair, ate little, drank water only, arranged all her plans and movements to avoid fatigue, and

performed even the smallest actions of her life with monastic regularity.

This stern system is carried, they say, even to the use of ice instead of water, and to the consumption of cold food exclusively, by an illustrious Polish woman, who, in our day, and at an age that is almost centenary, lives the life and follows the occupations of a reigning beauty. Destined, perhaps, to live as long as Marion Delorme, to whom biographers have given a hundred and thirty years, this vice-queen of Poland, at nearly one hundred, has a youthful heart and mind, a graceful figure, a charming waist. She can, in conversation, — where, by the by, her words sparkle like twigs in a blaze, — compare, of her own knowledge, the men and books of the present day with those of the eighteenth century. Living in Warsaw, she orders her bonnets from Herbault. A very great lady, she has all the energy of a little girl; she swims, she runs like a schoolboy, and she can throw herself on a sofa as gracefully as any young coquette; she scoffs at death, and laughs through life. Having amazed the Emperor Alexander, she is now amazing the Emperor Nicholas by the magnificence of her fêtes. She is still bringing tears to the eyes of the young men who love her; for she is of any age that she chooses to be, and the ineffable devotions of a grisette are as easy and natural to her as the grand air, the dignity of a great lady, for which she is so distinguished.

Did Madame d'Espard know Madame Zayonscek? Was she following her example? However that may be, it is certain that the marquise proved the benefit of the Polish system: her complexion was pure, her

forehead unwrinkled, and her body, like that of Diane, kept its supple freshness, a charm that holds the love a woman wins. The simple precautions of this régime, suggested by art, by nature, and possibly by experience, found in Madame d'Espard a temperament which aided them. The marquise was endowed by nature with a profound indifference for all that was not herself. Men amused her, but none of them had ever caused her those great emotions which deeply stir two natures and bend either one of them to the other. She had neither hatred nor love. If offended, she revenged herself coldly and tranquilly at her leisure, awaiting the occasion to gratify the ill-feeling she kept toward those who had once opposed her. She never moved a finger herself in her revenge; she spoke, knowing well that any woman with two words can kill three men.

She had seen Monsieur d'Espard leave her with keen satisfaction; for he took away two children who were beginning to annoy her, and might, in a year or two, destroy her pretensions to youth. Her most intimate friends and her least persevering adorers, seeing her without those matron jewels whose irrepressible growth betrays a mother's age, supposed her to be really a young woman. The two sons, about whom the marquise had seemed so solicitous in her petition, were, as well as their father, as much unknown to the world of fashion as the North Pole still remains to adventurous mariners. Monsieur d'Espard was supposed to be an eccentric person who had deserted his wife without having the smallest ground of complaint against her.



Mistress of herself at twenty-two years of age, and mistress of her fortune, which amounted to twenty-six thousand francs a year, the marquise hesitated long before she decided on a course which would determine her future life. Though she profited by the money her husband had spent upon the house, and kept the furniture and the horses and equipages, in short, all the luxury of a well-appointed house, she led a retired life at first, during the years 1816-17-18, — a period when families were recovering from the cruel disasters of the political turmoil. Belonging, moreover, to one of the most illustrious families of the faubourg Saint-Germain, her relations urged her to live quietly after the separation which her husband's inexplicable caprice had forced upon her.

In 1820, however, the marquise issued from this dormant state; she appeared at court, went to fêtes, and received in her own house. From 1821 to 1827 she kept her household on a brilliant footing; was remarked upon for her taste in all things, more particularly in her dress. She took a day, and had her hours for reception; and presently she was able to seat herself on the throne where the Vicomtesse de Beauséant had formerly shone, also the Duchesse de Langeais, and Madame Firmiani, who, on her marriage with Monsieur Octave de Camps had resigned the sceptre into the hands of the Duchesse de Maufri-gneuse, from whom Madame d'Espard snatched it. The world knew nothing more about the life of the Marquise d'Espard than these general facts. She appeared likely to live long on the Parisian horizon, like a sun which seems nearly down, and yet does not set.

The marquise, during these years, became intimately connected with a duchess not less celebrated for her beauty than for her devotion to the person of a prince then in disgrace, but accustomed to take a leading part in past governments, as he was destined to do in future ones. Madame d'Espard was also the friend of a foreigner, a woman with whom a shrewd and illustrious Russian diplomatist was in the habit of discussing and analyzing public events; and, lastly, an old countess, accustomed to juggling with the cards of the great game of politics, adopted her almost maternally. To long-sighted men Madame d'Espard was seen to be thus preparing for a silent but real power which she intended should succeed the frivolous social sovereignty fashion had bestowed upon her. Her salon was beginning to take a political tone. The remark, "What do they say of it at Madame d'Espard's?" "Is Madame d'Espard's salon opposed to the measure?" began to be repeated by a sufficient number of simpletons to give the flock of faithfuls who attended it the authority of a coterie. A few political victims, soothed and petted by the marquise, — such, for instance, as the favorite of Louis XVIII., who was no longer of importance elsewhere, and several former ministers likely to come again into power, — declared that she was as clever in diplomacy as the noted wife of the Russian ambassador in London. The marquise had several times given either to deputies or peers certain sayings and ideas which subsequently echoed through Europe from the tribune. She had often correctly judged events on which the frequenters of her salon dared not venture an opinion.

The principal personages at court came to play whist at her house in the evenings. She had, it must be said, the good qualities of her defects. She was thought to be discreet, and really was so. Her friendships seemed able to stand all tests. She served her *protégés* with a constancy which proved that she thought less of making followers than of sustaining her own credit. This conduct was inspired by her dominant passion, vanity. The conquests and pleasures to which most women cling were to her the mere means to an end; she wanted to live at all the points of the widest circle that life could describe.

Among the men, still sufficiently young to make the future theirs, who filled her salons on the days she received, might be seen Messieurs de Marsay, de Ronquerolles, de Montriveau, de la Roche-Hugon, de Sérizy, Ferraud, Maxime de Trailles, de Listomère, the brothers Vandenesse, du Châletet, and others. She often admitted men whose wives she would not receive; and her social power was strong enough to impose these hard conditions on certain ambitious persons such as the two bankers, de Nucingen and Ferdinand du Tillet. But she had so long and so carefully studied the strength and weakness of Parisian social life that she conducted herself systematically in a manner that gave to no man the slightest advantage over her. A note or a letter by which she could be compromised was a thing impossible to obtain.

If the coldness of her heart allowed her to play this measured part with pre-eminent success, her external appearance served her equally well. Her figure was youthful; her voice was as she chose to make it, —



sweet and supple, hard and clear. She possessed to an eminent degree the secret of that aristocratic bearing by which a woman over-rides or effaces the past. The marquise knew the art of putting an immense space between herself and the man who fancied from some chance intimacy on her part that he had rights to a certain familiarity. Her imposing glance denied the past. In conversation, lofty and beautiful sentiments, noble conclusions seemed to flow naturally from a heart and soul so pure; but she was, in reality, a mass of calculations, quite capable of blasting a man who was awkward enough to interfere with her plans, if they touched her personal interests.

In attempting to attach himself to this woman, Rastignac had rightly judged her a most able instrument; but he had not yet used that instrument; far from being able to handle it, he found himself already being ground by it. This young *condottiere* of intellect, condemned, like Napoleon, to wage incessant war, knowing well that one defeat was the tomb of his future, had already discovered in his new protectress a dangerous adversary. For the first time in his turbulent life he was playing a game with a partner worthy of him. In the conquest of Madame d'Espard he saw looming before him a ministry; so he unwisely began by serving her before he made use of her, — a dangerous beginning!

The hôtel d'Espard required a host of servants, for the style of living of the marquise was almost magnificent. The great reception-rooms were on the ground-floor, but she herself lived on the first floor. The splendor of the grand staircase, the apartments deco-

rated in a style that recalled the former Versailles were so many signs of a vast fortune. When the judge saw the *porte-cochère* open to his nephew's cabriolet, he examined with a rapid glance the porter's lodge, the porter himself, the court-yard, the stables, the arrangement of the dwelling, the flowers that decked the staircase, the exquisite cleanliness of the stairs themselves, the walls, the carpets; and he counted the footmen in livery who came out upon the landing when the bell rang. His eyes, which, in the morning, in his grimy room, had fathomed the grandeur of humble poverty beneath the muddy garments of the populace, now studied with the same lucid vision the furniture and decorations of the rooms through which he passed to discover the poverty of grandeur.

“Monsieur Popinot — Monsieur Bianchon.”

The two names were announced at the door of the boudoir where the marquise was seated, — a pretty room, recently re-furnished, and looking out on the garden. At this moment Madame d'Espard occupied one of those *rococo* arm-chairs which MADAME had brought into fashion. Rastignac, on her left, sat on a low chair which he appeared to have appropriated, like the *cavaliere* of an Italian lady. Standing at the corner of the fireplace, was a third personage.

As the sapient doctor had said, Madame d'Espard's temperament was harsh and nervous; had it not been for the regimen to which she subjected herself, her skin would have had the blotched and reddened appearance produced by constant over-excitement. As it was, she added to the effect of her superinduced whiteness by the vigorous tones and the judicious light and

shade by which she surrounded herself or with which she arrayed her person. Red-browns, maroon with gold reflections became her marvellously. Her boudoir, copied from that of a celebrated Englishwoman then the vogue in London, was draped in tan-colored velvet, to which she had added various decorations of exquisite design which lessened the pompous dignity of that regal color. Her hair was dressed like that of a young girl, smooth upon the forehead and falling thence in curls, which increased the rather long oval of her face; but just as round shapes are common, and often ignoble, so the oblong form is dignified and even majestic. A double mirror with facets will give evident proof of this rule when employed to reflect the face.

On perceiving Popinot, who stopped on the threshold like a timid animal, and stretched out his neck, one hand being thrust, as usual, into a pocket, the other holding a hat with a greasy brim, the marquise cast a glance at Rastignac in which was a gleam of satire. The rather silly expression of the good man's face agreed so well with his grotesque attire and his frightened air, that Rastignac, catching sight, at the moment, of Bianchon's annoyed face, could not help laughing as he turned away his head. The marquise gently inclined her head and made an apparently painful effort to rise from her chair, into which she fell back gracefully, as if to excuse her impoliteness by extreme debility.

At that moment the personage standing with his back to the fireplace brought forward two chairs and offered them with a slight bow to the judge and the

doctor; then, as soon as they were seated, he resumed his former attitude and crossed his arms. A word on that man.

We have a painter in these days, Decamps, who possesses, in the highest degree, the art of interesting the mind in some object he presents to the eye, whether it be a stone or a human being. In this respect, his drawing is more effective than his coloring. For instance, he draws an unfurnished room and puts a broom resting against the wall of it; if he chooses he can make you shudder at the sight of that broom; you fancy it has just been the assistant of some crime; it has dabbled in blood; it may have been the broom which the widow Bancal used to sweep out the room where Fualdès was murdered. Yes, the painter invests that broom with the fury of anger; its bristles are standing up like the terrified hairs of your head; he makes it the interpreter between the silent poesy of his own imagination and that which develops in your own. Having roused and alarmed your mind by the sight of that broom, to-morrow he will draw another, beside which lies a cat, asleep, but most suggestive in its sleep; you see at once that that is the broom the wife of the German shoemaker bestrides when she goes to the Brocken; but the next day that broom is a pacific implement on which is hung the coat of a clerk in a public office. Decamps has in his pencil what Paganini has in his bow, — a magnetically communicative power.

Well, it is necessary to convey to the art of words this form of genius, this chic of the pencil, to picture that tall, thin, erect man, dressed in black, with long

black hair, who leaned against that fireplace without uttering a word. His profile was like the blade of a knife, cold and sharp, and the skin was the color of Seine water when stirred and muddied. He gazed on the ground, all the while listening and judging. His attitude had something alarming in it. He was there like Decamps' celebrated broom, in which lay the power to present an idea of crime. Sometimes, during the conference that ensued, the marquise endeavored to obtain some tacit advice by turning her eyes for an instant upon that personage; but however eager her mute interrogation might be, he continued as cold and rigid as the Statue of the Commander.



## V.

WHAT WAS SAID BETWEEN A WOMAN OF THE WORLD  
AND JUDGE POPINOT.

THE worthy Popinot, sitting on the edge of his chair, facing the fire, his hat between his legs, gazed at the gilded candelabra, the clock, the curiosities collected on the mantel-shelf, the velvet hangings, and all the other charming and costly things with which a woman of fashion surrounds herself. He was drawn from this bourgeois contemplation by the flute-like voice of Madame d'Espard saying to him: —

“Monsieur, I owe you ten thousand thanks —”

“Ten thousand!” thought the worthy man; “that’s too many; there is n’t one.”

“— for the trouble you have deigned —”

“Deigned!” thought he; “she is fooling me.”

“— to take in coming to see a poor petitioner too feeble to go to you —”

Here the judge cut short the marquise’s speech, giving her an inquisitorial look which settled to his mind the sanitary condition of the poor petitioner. “She is perfectly well,” thought he.

“Madame,” he said, with a respectful air, “you owe me nothing. Though my action in coming here is not according to our usual customs, a judge ought to spare no pains in discovering the actual truth of such affairs. Our verdicts can then be given less in the

mere spirit of the law than according to the inspiration of our own perceptions. Whether I inquire into the truth in my own study or here is of no consequence, provided I can get at that truth."

While Popinot was speaking, Rastignac pressed Bianchon's hand, and the marquise made the doctor a gracious little sign with her head, full of gratitude.

"Who is that gentleman?" said Bianchon, in a whisper to Rastignac, signing to the man in black.

"The Chevalier d'Espard; brother of the marquis."

"Your nephew tells me," said the marquise to Popinot, "how very busy you are; I knew already that you did good in secret, and hid your benefactions in order to relieve those you benefit from the burden of gratitude. Your labors in court must weary you exceedingly. Why do they not double the number of judges?"

"Ah! madame, that's not the trouble," said Popinot; "things would go worse if they did. Your idea is n't a bad one; but when that comes about, hens will have teeth."

At this speech, which agreed so well with the general expression of the judge's countenance, the Chevalier d'Espard looked him over with a single glance, that seemed to say: "Easy enough to get the better of you."

The marquise looked at Rastignac, who stooped over and whispered in her ear.

"Such are the men appointed to decide the interests, and often the lives of their fellows!"

Like most men who have grown old in their profession, Popinot let himself slide into the habits there

contracted, habits of thought especially. His style of address was that of an examining judge. He liked to question those with whom he spoke, getting them into unexpected dilemmas, and making them say more than they intended. Pozzo di Borgo amused himself, it is said, by detecting, in that way, the secrets of diplomats; long practice developed in him a mind that was steeped in craft.

As soon as Popinot had, as it were, surveyed the ground on which he stood, he thought it necessary to have recourse to the shrewdest, best concealed, and most circuitous ways known to the Palais of getting at the truth. Bianchon was cold and stiff, like a man who has made up his mind to endure pain and say nothing about it; inwardly, he was wishing that his uncle might step on that woman and crush her as we tread on a snake, — a comparison which may have been suggested to his mind by the long trailing gown, the serpentine position, the stretching neck, the little head, and the undulating movements of the Marquise d'Espard.

"Well, monsieur," said the latter, "however much I dislike to urge my claims, I have suffered too long not to hope that you will bring this matter to a speedy conclusion. When may I expect the verdict in my favor?"

"Madame, I will do all that depends on me," replied Popinot, in a kindly manner. "Are you ignorant of the reasons which led to the separation now existing between yourself and the Marquis d'Espard?" he asked, looking directly at her.

"Yes, monsieur," she replied, with the manner of

one who relates a prepared tale. "At the beginning of the year 1816 Monsieur d'Espard, who for three months past had changed very much in temper, proposed to me to go and live on one of his estates near Briançon, without considering my health, which that climate would have impaired, or my tastes and habits. I refused to accompany him. My refusal led him to reproach me so unjustly and for such ill-founded reasons, that, for the first time, I began to doubt the soundness of his mind. The following day he abandoned me, leaving me his house and the free disposal of my own income, and went to live in the rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Genève, taking my two children with him —"

"Permit me, madame," said the judge, interrupting her; "how much is that income?"

"Twenty-six thousand francs," she replied, in a parenthesis. "I immediately consulted old Monsieur Bordin as to what I ought to do," she continued; "but it appeared that the difficulties in the way of removing a father from the guardianship of his children are such that I was forced to resign myself to a solitary life at the age of twenty-two,—an age at which many a young woman would have committed follies. You have, no doubt, read my petition, monsieur; you know the principal facts on which I base my request for Monsieur d'Espard's sequestration?"

"Have you taken many steps toward your husband, madame, with a view to obtain your children?" asked the judge.

"Yes, monsieur; but they have all been useless. It is very cruel for a mother to be deprived of the

affection of her children; above all, when they are capable of giving her the happiness all women crave."

"The eldest must be sixteen," said the judge.

"Fifteen!" interposed the marquise, eagerly.

Here Bianchon looked at Rastignac. Madame d'Espard bit her lips.

"What can the ages of my children signify to you?" she said.

"Ah, madame," replied the judge, appearing not to notice the bearing of his words, "a lad of fifteen and his brother (about thirteen, I suppose) have legs and minds; they might have come to see you; if they don't come it must be to obey their father, and the fact of their obeying him in such a matter shows that they love him."

"I don't understand you," said the marquise.

"You are perhaps ignorant that your lawyer makes you say in your petition that your children are extremely unhappy with their father."

Madame d'Espard replied with artless innocence:—

"I don't know what my lawyer made me say."

"Pardon me these deductions, but law and justice must weigh all facts," said Popinot. "The questions I put to you, madame, are inspired by the desire of thoroughly understanding this affair. According to you, Monsieur d'Espard abandoned you on a most frivolous pretext. But instead of going to Briançon, where he wished to take you, he stayed in Paris! There is a point that is not at all clear. Did he know this Madame Jeanrenaud before his marriage?"

"No, monsieur," replied the marquise, with a displeasure that was visible only to Rastignac and the Chevalier d'Espard.

She felt annoyed at being put in the dock by this judge whose judgment she desired to pervert; but, as Popinot's preoccupation of mind made his manner as vacant as ever, she ended by attributing these questions to the inquisitive genius of Voltaire's *bailli*.

"My relatives," she said, continuing her recital, "married me, at the age of sixteen, to Monsieur d'Espard, whose name, fortune, and habits corresponded to those which my family required in my husband. Monsieur d'Espard was then twenty-six years old; he was a gentleman in the English acceptance of the word; his manners pleased me; he seemed to have much ambition — and I like ambitious men," she added, with a glance at Rastignac. "If Monsieur d'Espard had not encountered this Madame Jeanrenaud, his fine qualities, his acquirements, and his knowledge would have carried him, according to the opinion of his friends, into the government. The king, Charles X., then MONSIEUR, held him in high esteem, and the peerage, a place at court, and a high place, would undoubtedly have been his. That woman turned his head and destroyed the future of a whole family."

"What were Monsieur d'Espard's religious opinions?"

"He was," she said, "and he still is a man of professed piety."

"Do you think that this Madame Jeanrenaud exercises some mystical power over him?"

"No, monsieur."

"You have a fine house, madame," said Popinot, abruptly, taking his hands from his pockets and

rising to draw aside the tails of his coat and warm himself. "This boudoir is very comfortable, these chairs are magnificent; your apartments are, indeed, sumptuous! You must suffer much while living in such luxury to feel, as you say, that your children are ill-lodged, ill-fed, ill-clothed. I cannot imagine anything more distressing for a mother."

"Yes, you are right, monsieur. I would give anything if I could only procure some happiness for those poor boys, whose father makes them toil, I am told, from morning till night, on this deplorable work about China."

"You give fine balls which would amuse them. But then," added the judge, reflectively, "they might get a taste for dissipation. I suppose their father does bring them, or send them to you, sometimes?"

"Twice a year, monsieur; on New Year's day and on my birthday. On those days Monsieur d'Espard does me the favor to dine with me."

"Very singular conduct," said Popinot, with a convinced air. "Have you ever seen this Madame Jeanrenaud?"

"Once; my brother-in-law, who, in his brother's interests —"

"Ah!" interrupted Popinot; "then monsieur is the brother of Monsieur d'Espard?"

The chevalier bowed without speaking.

"The Chevalier d'Espard, who is conversant with the whole affair, took me to the Oratory where this woman goes, for she is a Protestant. I saw her; there is nothing attractive about her; she looks like a butcher's wife; extremely fat and horribly pitted with

the small-pox; she has the feet and hands of a man, and squints! — in short, she is hideous.”

“It is inconceivable!” exclaimed the judge, looking the greatest fool of all the judges in the kingdom. “And that creature lives not far from here in a fine mansion! Well, well! there’s no such thing as a bourgeois in these days.”

“Yes, a mansion on which she and her son have lavished money.”

“Madame,” said the judge, “I live in the faubourg Saint-Marceau, and I know very little about such expenses; what do you call lavishing money?”

“Why,” said the marquise, “keeping up a stable, five horses, three carriages, a *calèche*, a *coupé*, and a cabriolet.”

“And that costs a big sum?” inquired Popinot, apparently astonished.

“Enormous,” interposed Rastignac. “The keeping of such a stable, the care of the carriages and the liveries cost not less than fifteen to sixteen thousand francs a year.”

“Do you think so, madame?” asked Popinot, in a tone of doubt.

“Yes, at least that sum,” replied the marquise.

“And the furnishing of their mansion, — I suppose that cost a big sum, too?”

“More than a hundred thousand francs,” replied the marquise, smiling at the judge’s vulgarity.

“Judges, madame,” said Popinot, “are very unbelieving; in fact, they are paid to be so, and I am. But if these things are true the Sieur Jeanrenaud and his mother have swindled Monsieur d’Espard strangely.



Here's a stable which, you say, costs sixteen thousand francs a year. The table, servants' wages, and other household expenses must amount to at least three times as much, which brings the total up to over sixty thousand francs a year. Do you suppose that those persons, formerly, you say, so poor, could have acquired all that fortune? The interest on a million is only forty thousand francs."

"Monsieur, the son and his mother invested the sums given them by Monsieur d'Espard on the Grand-Livre when the Funds were at 60 to 80. I think their income must amount to over sixty thousand francs. Besides, the son has a good salary."

"If they spend sixty thousand francs a year," said the judge, "how much do you spend?"

"About the same," replied Madame d'Espard.

The chevalier made a movement, the marquise flushed, Bianchon glanced at Rastignac, but the judge looked so kindly a simpleton that the marquise felt reassured. The chevalier seemed to take no further interest in the conversation; he considered the game as lost.

"These Jeanrenauds, madame," said Popinot, "might be summoned before a police-court."

"I have always thought so," replied the marquise, delighted. "If threatened with exposure in court they would compromise."

"Madame," said Popinot, "when Monsieur d'Espard left you, did he give you a power of attorney to receive and manage your property?"

"I don't understand the object of these questions," said the marquise, sharply. "It seems to me that if

you take into consideration the state in which the insanity of my husband has placed me you ought to concern yourself with him and not with me."

"Madame," said the judge, "I am coming to that. But before confiding to you, or to others, the administration of your husband's property, it is proper that the court should know how you have managed your own property. If Monsieur d'Espard gave you a power of attorney, he placed confidence in you, and the court will appreciate that fact. Did you receive the power of attorney? Under it you would have been authorized to buy and sell stocks and bonds and re-invest the money."

"No, monsieur. The Blamont-Chauvrys are not accustomed to do business," she said, deeply insulted in her pride of nobility, and forgetting her immediate cue. "My property is intact; Monsieur d'Espard gave me no power of attorney."

The chevalier put his hand before his eyes that they might not betray the keen annoyance he felt at his sister-in-law's want of foresight; he saw she was destroying her own case. Popinot had marched straight to the fact, in spite of the apparent irrelevance of his questions.

"Madame," said the judge, indicating the chevalier, "monsieur is connected with you by ties of blood; but can I speak openly before these other gentlemen?"

"Yes," said the marquise, surprised by such caution.

"Well, madame, you admit that you spend sixty thousand francs a year, — and the sum seems to me well-spent, in view of your stables, your mansion, your

numerous servants, and the habits of a household which are, doubtless, superior to those of the Jean-renauds — ”

The marquise made a haughty sign of assent.

“Now,” continued the judge, “~~as~~ you possess only twenty-six thousand francs a year, you must — between ourselves be it said — have debts to at least, if not more than, a hundred thousand francs. The court will therefore have the right to suppose that the motive which prompts you to apply for the removal of your husband from the management of his property is one of self-interest; in other words, the necessity of paying your debts, if — you — have — any. An earnest request for my interest has led me to examine your situation; I beg you now to examine it yourself and to be candid in admitting the facts. There is still time — if my suppositions are correct — to save yourself from the scandal of a blame which the court might attribute to you unless you make your position perfectly plain and clear. We are bound to examine into the motives of our petitioners, as well as to listen to the statements of the other side; we must make sure that the persons endeavoring to sequester another are not guided either by passion, or by a cupidity which is, unfortunately, becoming only too prevalent in the present day — ”

The marquise was broiling like Saint Laurence on his gridiron.

“And,” continued the judge, “I must have more light on this subject. Madame, I do not demand a strict accounting from you, but I must inquire how it is that you have been able to keep up an expenditure

of sixty thousand francs a year, and that for several years. Many women accomplish that phenomenon in their homes, I know, but you are not of their kind. Speak frankly; you may have had perfectly legitimate means of obtaining the money, — a royal grant, indemnities recently granted; though in that case your husband's permission would be necessary to enable you to receive them."

The marquise made no reply.

"Reflect," said Popinot, "that Monsieur d'Espard will, of course, defend himself, and his lawyers will have the right to search for your creditors. This boudoir is newly furnished; the rest of the house seems to have been redecorated since Monsieur le marquis left you in 1816. If, as you were good enough to tell me, the furnishing of a mansion for such people as the Jeanrenauds was costly, how much more costly must it be for you, who are a great lady. If I am mistaken you must set me right. Remember the duties that the law lays upon me; the rigorous inquiries that I am bound to make before proceeding to the extreme act of depriving the father of a family of his rights in the prime of life. You must therefore, Madame la marquise, excuse the difficulties I have the honor of submitting to you, and on which you can easily give me explanations. When a man is set aside on the ground of insanity, the law requires the appointment of a guardian. Who is to be the guardian?"

"His brother," replied the marquise.

The chevalier bowed. An awkward silence fell upon the five persons present. In his casual way the judge had laid bare the woman's secret sore. Popinot's

good-natured, silly face, at which the marquise, Rastignac, and the chevalier had felt inclined to laugh, now acquired in their eyes its actual character. The absurd individual was a clear-sighted judge. His vulgar interest in the cost of the boudoir explained itself. Starting from the gilded elephant which supported the clock, he had followed this luxury step by step, and had ended by reading to the bottom of the woman's soul.

"If the Marquis d'Espard is crazy on the subject of China," said Popinot, at last, pointing to the elephant, "I see that the products of that country are equally agreeable to you. But perhaps it is to him that you owe all these charming Chineseries," he added, looking round the room.

This little jest, which was full of good taste, made Bianchon smile, surprised Rastignac, and caused the marquise to bite her thin lips.

"Monsieur," said Madame d'Espard, "instead of being the protector of a woman placed under the cruel alternative of seeing her fortune lost and her children ruined, or of seeming to be the enemy of her husband, you accuse me, and suspect my motives! You must acknowledge that your conduct is very singular."

"Madame," said the judge, "the great care which the courts bestow upon cases of this kind might have given you, in another judge, a far less indulgent critic than I. Remember, also, that Monsieur d'Espard's lawyer will not spare you. You may be sure that he will condemn and vilify acts and intentions on your part which may be perfectly pure and disinterested. Your life will belong to him; and he will turn it inside

out, — not treating you with the respectful deference that I have shown.”

“For which I thank you,” said the marquise, ironically. “Admitting for a moment that I owe thirty — fifty thousand francs, what would that be to the d’Espards and the Blamont-Chauvrys? But suppose, as I say, it were so, would that prevent my husband from being confined if he is mad?”

“No, madame.”

“Though you have questioned me with a slyness I did not suppose a judge would be guilty of using in a matter where frankness sufficed to tell you all, and though,” she said, “I still regard myself as justified in making you no answer, I am willing to say, without subterfuge, that my position in society and all these efforts made to maintain it are not in accordance with my tastes. I began my life, after my husband left me, by living for years in solitude; but of late the interests of my children appeal to me, and I feel that I ought to take the place of their father. By receiving my friends, maintaining all social relations, — making debts, if you choose to say so, — I assist the future of my sons; I am preparing brilliant careers for them, in which they will find among my friends both aid and encouragement.”

“I appreciate your devotion, madame,” replied the judge. “It does you honor, and I should be the last to blame such conduct. But the magistrate belongs to all, and not to any one side; he must know everything and weigh everything.”

The natural tact of the marquise and her long habit of judging men made her aware that Monsieur Popinot

was not to be influenced by any personal considerations. She had counted on meeting an ambitious magistrate; she had met an upright conscience. Feeling the uselessness of her present tactics she began to think of other means of succeeding in her ends.

The servants brought in tea.

"Has madame any further explanations to give me?" said Popinot, rising, as he saw these preparations.

"Monsieur," she said, haughtily, "do your duty; examine Monsieur d'Espard and you will pity me, I am certain." She raised her head, and looked at Popinot with a pride that was mingled with impertinence. The good man bowed respectfully.

"He's a pretty fellow, your uncle!" said Rastignac aside to Bianchon. "Can't he comprehend anything? Does n't he know what the Marquise d'Espard is, and what her influence and her secret power in society are? She'll send for the Keeper of the Seals to-morrow, and your uncle will be made to feel it."

"My dear fellow, how can I help it?" said Bianchon. "Did n't I warn you how it would be? My uncle is not an accommodating man."

"No, he is a man to get rid of," replied Rastignac.

The doctor was forced to bow in haste to the marquise and her mute brother-in-law, and hurry after Popinot, who, not being one to linger in a disagreeable situation, was already at the door.

"That woman owes at least three hundred thousand francs," said the judge, as he got into his nephew's cabriolet.

"What do you think of the affair?"

"I?" said the judge. "I never have any opinion till I have examined the whole case. To-morrow, early, I shall summon that Madame Jeanrenaud to my office at four in the afternoon, and question her as to the facts which relate to herself and her son, for they both seem compromised in the matter."

"I'd like to know the secret of it."

"Good gracious! don't you see that the marquise is the tool of that tall stick of a man who never said a word. There's Cain in him, but a Cain who finds his club on the judge's bench, — where, however, unluckily for him, we have more than one sword of Damocles."

"Ah! Rastignac," cried Bianchon, "why did you ever set your foot in such a business?"

"We are accustomed to see plenty of such little plots in families," said the judge. "There's never a year that we don't render judgments of *non-lieu* on appeals for the confinement of lunatics. Morality seems to see nothing dishonorable in such attempts; whereas we send to the galleys some poor devil who breaks a pane of glass in a jeweller's window. The Code is not without its defects."

"But remember the facts stated in the petition."

"My dear boy, you don't know the romances which clients tell to their lawyers. Besides, if lawyers presented only the truth they wouldn't earn enough to pay the interest on the costs of their practice."



## VI.

## THE INSANE MAN.

THE next day, at four in the afternoon, a stout lady, who resembled a cask on which a gown and a belt had been fastened, toiled, panting and sweating, up the stairs of Judge Popinot. She had descended, with much difficulty, from a green landau which exactly corresponded to her; the landau could not be conceived of without the woman, nor the woman without the landau.

"It is I, my dear monsieur," she said, presenting herself at the door of the judge's office, — "Madame Jeanrenaud, whom you have sent for as though she were nothing more nor less than a thief." These rather vulgar words were said in a vulgar voice, wheezy with asthma, and were stopped by a fit of coughing. "When I go through damp places you have no idea what I suffer, monsieur. I shall never make old bones, saving your presence. But anyhow, here I am."

The judge was quite taken aback at the sight of this Maréchale d'Ancre. Madame Jeanrenaud had a skin that was pitted with innumerable holes all highly colored, a low forehead, a flat nose, a face as round as a cannon-ball; in fact, every part of the good woman was round. She had the lively eyes, the frank man-

ner, the jovial talk of a countrywoman; her chestnut hair was pushed back under a bonnet-cap worn beneath a green bonnet adorned with bunches of auriculas, commonly called bear's ears. Her voluminous bosom was laughable, and excited some dread of grotesque explosion when she laughed. Her stout legs were of the kind that makes the gamin of Paris say of certain solid women that they are built on piles. The worthy widow wore a green gown trimmed with chinchilla. In short, she was quite in keeping with her last words, "Here I am!"

"Madame," said Popinot, "you are suspected of having employed seduction on Monsieur le Marquis d'Espard, in order to obtain from him considerable sums of money."

"Accused of *what*?" she cried; "seduction! But, my dear monsieur, you are a respectable man, and, besides, as a magistrate, you must have common-sense. Just look at me! Am I a woman to seduce any one? I can't even tie my shoes. It is twenty years since I've been able to lace my stays without the danger of sudden death. When I was eighteen I was slim as asparagus, and pretty, too, as I may say now. That was the time I married Jeanrenaud, a worthy man, skipper of a salt-boat. I had my son, who is a fine-looking fellow, and my glory; for though I tell it to my credit, he's my best piece of work. That boy has been a soldier of Napoleon, and one of the Imperial Guard. But, alas! my poor Jeanrenaud's death — for he died drowned — was a dreadful change for me. I took the small-pox and stayed in my room for months; and when I came out I was as fat as you see me now,

ugly as sin, and miserable as the stones of the street. There's my seductions for you!"

"But, madame, what then can be the motives which lead Monsieur d'Espard to give you such large sums of money?"

"Immense; call them immense, monsieur, and I'll agree with you; but as for his motives, I am not authorized to tell them."

"You do wrong. His family, very justly alarmed, are expecting to confine him as a lunatic."

"Good God!" cried the good woman, jumping up with remarkable vivacity, "is it possible that they are tormenting him about me? — he! a king of men! a man who has n't his equal! Rather than any harm should happen to him, rather, I may say, than he should lose one hair from his head, we would give up all, all, monsieur. Write that down on your papers. Heavens and earth! I must go and tell my boy about this. Ha! who ever heard the like?"

With that she left the room, rolled to the staircase and disappeared.

"She does n't lie, that one," thought the judge. "At any rate, I shall know the truth to-morrow, for to-morrow I'll go and examine the Marquis d'Espard."

Persons who have passed the age when the human being spends his life heedlessly, at random, are aware of the influence exerted on serious matters by things apparently unimportant, and they will not be surprised at the gravity attaching to the following little circumstance. The next day Popinot had a coryza, a malady not dangerous, and known, commonly, under the foolish and incorrect name of "cold in the head."

Having no reason to suppose that a short delay would prove serious, the judge, who felt feverish, stayed in the house and did not go to examine the Marquis d'Espard. This one lost day was to this affair what the broth taken by Marie de Medici was on the famous day of Dupes, which, by delaying her conference with Louis XIII., enabled Richelieu to get first to Saint-Germain and recover his royal captive.

Before following the judge and his clerk to the residence of the Marquis d'Espard, it may be well to cast a glance on the house, the home, and the affairs of this father of a family, represented to be insane by his wife's petition.

We find here and there in the old quarters of Paris various buildings in which archæology perceives a certain desire to ornament the city, together with that passion for proprietorship which makes mankind endeavor to give permanence to its buildings. The house where Monsieur d'Espard was now living, in the rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève, was one of those ancient erections built of freestone; it was not without richness in its architecture, though time had blackened its stones, and the many revolutions of the city had changed its aspect both within and without. The great personages who formerly inhabited the quarter of the University having departed, together with the great ecclesiastical institutions, this old dwelling had since sheltered trades, industries, and a class of inhabitants for which it was never intended.

During the last century a printing-office had defaced its floors, soiled its panels, blackened its walls, and changed the divisions of its various rooms. Once

the mansion of a cardinal, the fine old house was now the dwelling of many obscure tenants. The style of its architecture proved that it was built during the reigns of Henri III., Henri IV., and Louis XIII., the period at which the hôtels Mignon, Serpente, the palace of the Princesse Palatine, and the Sorbonne were built in the same neighborhood.

Monsieur d'Espard occupied the ground-floor, no doubt for the sake of the garden, which might pass for spacious in such crowded quarters, and lay to the south, — two advantages which conduced to the health of his children. The situation of the house, in a street the name of which indicates a rapid descent of ground, gave to this ground-floor apartment enough height to prevent its being damp. Monsieur d'Espard had hired it — for a very moderate sum, rents in this quarter being low at the time he went there — in order to be near the schools, and to superintend, himself, the education of his sons. The state of the premises when he hired them was such that he was obliged to repair and fit up his apartment on the ground-floor, which he did in a manner that made it a suitable residence. He restored the woodwork to those brown tones beloved in Holland, and by the old Parisian bourgeoisie, which, in our day, afford such fine effects to painters of genre. The walls were hung with plain papers which harmonized well with the woodwork. The windows had curtains of some material that was not costly, and yet was chosen in a manner to produce an effect in keeping with the general harmony. The furniture was choice and well arranged.

Whoever entered those rooms could not fail to be conscious of a peaceful, tranquil feeling, inspired by the stillness and silence that reigned there, by the quietness and symphony of the coloring, — giving to that word “symphony” the meaning which artists attach to it. A certain nobility of detail, a perfect harmony between the persons and the things, brought, insensibly, to the lips the word *suave*. Few persons were admitted to these apartments occupied by the marquis and his sons, whose lives might, therefore, seem mysterious to the surrounding neighborhood.

On the third story of the same house were three large rooms, still in the state of dilapidation and grotesque bareness in which the former printing-office had left them. These rooms, devoted to the preparation of the “*Picturesque History of China*,” were so arranged as to contain an office, a ware-room, and a smaller office in which Monsieur d’Espard spent a portion of his day; for, after the mid-day breakfast until four in the afternoon, he was always at work on the third floor, engaged in superintending the preparation of the work he had undertaken. Persons who came to see him sought him there, and not in his own apartments; his sons, on their return from school, would frequently go up there. But the home on the ground-floor was the sanctuary where father and sons spent their days between the dinner hour and the next morning.

The family life was carefully guarded. Two servants sufficed for its wants: a cook, an old woman long attached to the d’Espard family; and a valet forty years old, who had served the marquis before his mar-

riage with Mademoiselle de Blamont. The children's governess had also remained with them, and the order and neatness of the establishment was a visible proof of the maternal affection she put into the management of the household and the care of the children. Grave, and not communicative, these three good people seemed to have entered into the hidden thought which guided the life of their master. The contrast of their reserved habits and the ways of other cooks and valets contributed, perhaps, to the air of mystery which was thought to surround this home, and did, in fact, give rise to calumnies for which, it must be owned, Monsieur d'Espard himself gave some occasion.

Proper and praiseworthy motives had made him resolve to have no communication with the other tenants of the old house. In undertaking the education of his sons he was anxious to keep them from intercourse with strangers. Perhaps, also, he wished to avoid the annoyances of too close neighborhood. In a man of his station, at a time when liberalism was becoming rampant in the Latin quarter, such conduct not unnaturally excited against him those petty passions and jealousies the silliness of which, equalled only by their meanness, finds vent in porters' gossip and malicious talk from door to door; about which Monsieur d'Espard and his servants were wholly ignorant. The valet was called a Jesuit, the cook a sly dissembler, and the governess was said to be in league with the others to rob the old crazy man, — the crazy man being the marquis; his fellow lodgers having come to believe that a life which did not pass through the sieve of their own appreciations was first an unrea-

sonable, and then an insane one. In short, the habits and ways of the marquis, his sons, and his servants gave rise to ill-will among his neighbors, and brought the latter, by degrees, to that state of mind in which ignorant persons recoil at no baseness if it can do harm to an adversary they have themselves created.

Monsieur d'Espard was a noble, just as his wife was a great lady, — two striking types now so rare in France that an observer might count the persons who offer a complete realization of them. These two characters are founded on primitive ideas, on beliefs, so to speak, inborn, on habits, acquired from infancy, which no longer exist. To believe in pure blood, in a privileged race, to put himself in thought above other men, — must not such a man from his very birth have measured the distance which separates patricians from the people? To command, he must never have known an equal; and education must have enforced ideas which nature inspires in such men, whose brow she crowns before their mother's kiss is laid there. These ideas and this education are no longer possible in France, where, for the last forty years luck has seized the right to make nobles by taking them from bloody battle-fields, gilding them with glory, crowning them with the halo of genius; where the abolition of entails and the consequent partitioning of property has forced the noble to occupy himself with his own affairs instead of being occupied by the affairs of the State; where personal grandeur can be acquired only by long and patient labor, — an era wholly novel.

Considered as a relic of that great body called feudality, Monsieur d'Espard deserves respectful admira-



tion. If he believed himself, through his blood, above his fellow-men, he believed also in all the obligations of nobility; he possessed the virtues and the force that it demands. His sons he had brought up to the same principles; to them he had communicated from their cradles the religion of his caste. A profound sense of their dignity, pride in their name, the certainty of being great in themselves, gave them the characteristics of royal honor, knightly courage, and the protecting kindness of the lords of a manor. Their manners, in harmony with these ideas, would have seemed noble among princes, but they wounded the dwellers in the Latin quarter, — a land of equality if ever there was one, where, from the lesser to the greater, all men denied the privileges of nobility to a noble without money, for the same reason that they grant them to a wealthy burgher.

In the father as well as in the children external appearance and soul were in harmony. Monsieur d'Espard, now about forty-four years of age, might have served as a model by which to exhibit the aristocracy of nobility to the nineteenth century. He was fair and slender; his face had that natural distinction in its contour and general expression which tells of noble sentiments; but it bore the impress of a cold reserve which seemed to demand too much respect. His aquiline nose, turned at the tip from left to right (a slight deviation that was not without grace), his blue eyes, his high forehead, rather prominent under the eyebrows, which formed a thick line that overshadowed the eyes, were all signs of an upright mind, capable of perseverance, and of great loyalty, though

at the same time they gave a rather singular air to his physiognomy. The projection of the forehead might be thought to indicate a certain degree of eccentricity, and the thick eyebrows meeting over the nose added to this apparent singularity. His hands were white and delicately cared-for, his feet were narrow, and the insteps high. His speech was hesitating, not only in utterance, which, at times, was almost stuttering, but also in the expression of ideas; his thought and his speech produced upon the mind of his hearer the effect of a man who flits from point to point, touches and fingers and leaves everything, finishing nothing. This defect, purely external, contrasted with the decision of a mouth that was very firm, and with the generally determined character of the head. His rather jerky manner of walking seemed allied to his method of speech. These singularities of person contributed to confirm the popular impression of eccentricity. In spite of his elegance, he was systematically economical in dress; he wore for three or four years the same black coat, brushed with the utmost care by his devoted valet.

As for his sons, they were both handsome, and endowed by nature with a grace which did not exclude a certain expression of aristocratic disdain. They had the brightness of eye, the freshness of color, and the transparency of skin which denote pure morals, systematic habits, and the regular alternation of work and play. Both had black hair, blue eyes, and their father's crooked nose; but their mother had transmitted to them the dignity of speech, glance, and bearing which is hereditary among the Blamont-Chauvrys.

Their voices, pure as crystal, possessed the gift of touching the heart by soft, flowing tones that exercised a great fascination; in short, they had the voice a woman would have wished to hear after receiving the bright flame of their eyes. But, more than all this, they preserved the modesty of their pride, a chaste reserve, a *noli me tangere* in their demeanor. The eldest, Comte Clément d'Espard, was just entering his sixteenth year. For the last two years he had ceased to wear the pretty English jacket which his brother the Vicomte Camille d'Espard still wore. The count, who had now left the school of Henri IV., was dressed like a young man enjoying the first delights of elegance. His father had thought best not to make him go through a useless year in philosophy, but was trying to give a sort of link to his already acquired knowledge by a course of speculative mathematics. At the same time the marquis taught the lad the oriental languages, the laws of European diplomacy, heraldry, history at its fountain-head, that is to say, the history of treaties, charters, authentic documents, and the record of ordinances. The younger brother, Camille, had just begun his rhetoric.

The day on which Popinot set out to examine Monsieur d'Espard was a Thursday, and a holiday. At nine o'clock in the morning, before their father was awake, the two lads were playing in the garden. Clément was opposing, as best he could, his brother's desire to go to a pistol-gallery, where Camille had never yet been, and the latter was teasing his brother to obtain the coveted permission from their father. The viscount was apt to take advantage of being the

younger and the weaker, and took delight in a contest with his brother. They now began to quarrel and struggle like schoolboys. The noise they made in chasing each other round the garden awoke their father, who went to the window, unseen by them in the heat of the conflict. He stood there, watching, with pleasure, the two lads as they wrestled together, interlaced like snakes, their faces glowing with the exertion of all their strength. As they struggled their eyes flashed lightning, their limbs were twisted into living ropes; they fell, they scrambled up, they caught each other again like athletes in a circus, giving their father, as he watched them, one of those happinesses which compensate for the keenest pain of a troubled life.

Two persons, who were tenants of the house, chanced to observe the scene, and immediately reported to others that the old crazy man was amusing himself by inciting his sons to fight. Several heads appeared at the windows. The marquis, presently perceiving them, said a word to his sons, who at once climbed upon the window-sill, and jumped into the room, where Clément obtained the permission wanted by Camille. Meanwhile the tale of this new sign of craziness spread through the house.

When Popinot, accompanied by his clerk, arrived at the door about mid-day, and asked for Monsieur d'Espard, the portress took him up to the third floor, telling him, as she went along, how Monsieur d'Espard, no later than that very morning, had set his two children to fighting, and laughed, like the monster that he was, when he saw the younger biting the elder till the

blood came; no doubt he'd be glad enough if they killed themselves.

"Don't ask me why," she concluded; "he does n't know himself."

As she said these decisive words they had reached the landing on the third floor and were standing before a door bearing notices of the issue, in successive parts, of the "Picturesque History of China." This muddy landing, the dirty balusters, the door on which the former printing-office had left its grimy marks, the rickety windows and the ceilings where various apprentices had drawn fantastic gnomes with the smoky flame of their tallow candles, the mass of papers and rubbish heaped in the corners, intentionally, or by sheer neglect, — in short, all the details of the scene that now presented itself to the eyes of Popinot agreed so well with the allegations of the marquise that the judge, in spite of his impartiality, was inclined to believe her.

"Here you are, monsieur," said the portress. "Here 's the manufacture where the Chinese eat enough to feed the whole quarter."

The clerk smiled as he looked at the judge, and Popinot himself had some difficulty in keeping his countenance. The pair entered the first room, where was an old man who appeared to combine the duties of office-boy, shopman, and cashier. He was evidently the Maître Jacques of China. Long shelves, on which were piled the published numbers, went round the walls of the room, at the farther end of which a wooden partition with a wire screen, covered within by a green curtain, formed an office. A low opening in the

screen, through which the money passed, showed the position of what might be called the counting-room.

"Monsieur d'Espard?" said Popinot, addressing the old man, who was dressed in a gray blouse.

The latter opened the door of a second room, where the judge and his clerk saw a venerable old man with white hair, simply dressed, but decorated with the cross of Saint-Louis, sitting before a desk, who stopped comparing colored pages to look at the newcomers. This room was a very modest apartment, filled with books and proof-sheets. In it was a black wooden table, at which, no doubt, some person now absent was in the habit of working.

"Is monsieur the Marquis d'Espard?" said Popinot.

"No, monsieur," said the old man, rising. "Do you wish to see him?" he added, advancing toward them, and showing by his demeanor the manners and habits of a gentleman.

"We wish to see him on a matter that is entirely personal to himself," replied Popinot.

"D'Espard, here are two gentlemen who want you," said the old man, entering a third room, where the marquis was sitting near the fireplace reading a newspaper.

This last office had a shabby carpet, and the windows were draped with gray linen curtains; the furniture consisted, solely, in a few mahogany chairs, two arm-chairs, a rolling-topped secretary, a desk *à la* Tronchin, and on the fireplace a miserable clock and two old candlesticks. The old man ushered in Popinot and his clerk, and placed chairs for them, inviting them to sit down, as though he were master of the

establishment. After the usual salutations, during which the judge observed the insane man closely, the marquis very naturally inquired what was the object of the visit. Here Popinot looked significantly, first, at the old man, and then at the marquis, as he said:

“Monsieur le marquis, I think that the nature of my functions and the inquiry that brings me here, make it desirable that we should be alone; although it is in the spirit of our laws that, in cases like these, examinations should be made with a certain domestic publicity. I am a judge of one of the Lower courts of the Department of the Seine, and I have been appointed by the chief-justice to examine you as to certain facts set forth in a request for a commission in lunacy upon you, presented by Madame la Marquise d’Espard.”

The old man withdrew. When the judge and the marquis were alone Popinot’s clerk went to the door and closed it; then he seated himself, without ceremony, at the desk *à la* Tronchin, unrolled his papers, and prepared to write down the examination.

## VII.

## THE EXAMINATION.

POPINOT had not ceased to keep his eye on Monsieur d'Espard; he observed the effect of his announcement, cruel, indeed, to a man in his senses. The marquis, whose face was usually pale, like that of most fair persons, became suddenly scarlet with anger. He quivered slightly, sat down, laid aside his newspaper, and lowered his eyes. But he soon recovered the dignity of a gentleman, and looked at the judge, as if to find on his countenance some indications of his character.

"Why have I not been informed, before, of that petition?" he asked.

"Monsieur le marquis, the persons for whom such commissions are requested, being supposed not to be in their right minds, such notifications are thought useless. The duty of the court is, in the first place, to verify the allegations of the petition."

"Very true," said the marquis. "Therefore, monsieur, have the goodness to point out to me the manner in which I ought now to act."

"You need only answer my inquiries, omitting no detail," replied Popinot. "However delicate may be the reasons which have led you to act in a manner which gives Madame d'Espard a pretext for making



this petition, speak freely, and without fear. It is unnecessary to point out to you that a magistrate knows his duty, and that in such occurrences as these the utmost secrecy — ”

“Monsieur,” interrupted the marquis, whose face expressed a genuine grief, “if from my explanations it should appear that Madame d’Espard has been to blame, what would happen?”

“The court would probably censure her in giving the reasons for its decision.”

“Would that censure be optional with the judge? If, before answering you, I were to stipulate that nothing derogatory to Madame d’Espard should be said in case your decision is favorable to me, would the court regard my wishes?”

The judge looked at the marquis, and the two men then and there exchanged thoughts of true nobility.

“Noël,” said Popinot to his clerk, “go into the next room; if I want you I will call you. Monsieur,” he said to the marquis, as soon as the clerk had retired, “if, as I am inclined to believe, there is some misunderstanding in this matter, I can promise you that the court will regard your wishes and act with courtesy. The first fact alleged by Madame d’Espard, and the most serious fact of all,” he continued, after a slight pause, “is one on which I must ask you to enlighten me. It relates to the squandering of your property on a Madame Jeanrenaud, widow of a boatman, or rather, on her son, a colonel, for whom you have exhausted the favor you enjoy from the king, a favor that you ought to have employed for your own family. The petition asserts that this friendship for the Jean-

renauds exceeds all legitimate sentiments, and even goes beyond the limits of morality."

A sudden redness colored the face and forehead of the marquis, his eyes moistened; then an honorable pride checked the sensibility which might seem weakness in a man.

"Monsieur," said the marquis, in a strained voice, "you throw me into strange perplexity. The motives of my conduct ought to die with me. In order to speak of them, I must disclose to you secret circumstances, I must put into your keeping the honor of my family, and — a delicate matter which, perhaps, you will appreciate — I must speak to you of myself. I hope, monsieur, that all I say will remain an absolute secret between you and me. You will surely be able to render your judicial opinion without referring to the facts of my revelation —"

"Do not be uneasy on that score, Monsieur le marquis."

"Monsieur," said the marquis, "not long after my marriage, my wife had incurred such heavy expenses that I was forced to have recourse to a loan. You know the situation of noble families under the Revolution. I was not able to employ either a bailiff or agent; in these days nobles are forced to do their own business. Most of my title-deeds had been brought to Paris, from Languedoc, Provence, and the Comtat, by my father, who feared, alas, with good reason, the researches then being made into family title-deeds and what were called in those days 'parchments of privilege.' The actual name of our family is Nègrepelisse. D'Espard is a title acquired under Henri IV., by an

alliance which gave us the property and titles of the house of Espard, — an old family of Béarn, allied to the house of Albret through its female line, — on condition that we escutcheoned its arms upon ours, namely: or, three palys sable, quartered azure, two griffin's-paws talonny gules, placed saltier-wise, with the well-known *DES PARTEM LEONIS* for motto. At the time of this alliance we lost Nègrepelisse, a little town as celebrated during the religious wars as was my ancestor of that day who bore the name. That great captain was ruined by the burning of all his property by the Protestants, who did not spare a friend of Montluc. The crown was unjust towards Monsieur de Nègrepelisse; it gave him neither the marshal's bâton, nor a government, nor indemnities. King Charles IX., who loved him, died before he was able to reward him. Henri IV. did arrange the marriage I spoke of with Mademoiselle d'Espard, which procured him the property of that family; but the property of the Nègrepelisse had passed, by that time, into the hands of creditors. My great-grandfather the Marquis d'Espard was, like myself, placed very young at the head of his affairs by the death of his father, who, having dissipated his wife's fortune, left his son nothing but the entailed estates of the d'Espard family, and those were encumbered with a dowry. The young marquis, my great-grandfather, was, therefore, terribly embarrassed, and all the more so because he held an office at court. He became, however, a particular favorite of Louis XIV., and that proved his brevet of fortune. At this point, monsieur, there came upon our escutcheon a shameful stain, a stain of blood and

dishonor, which I am now employed in wiping out. I discovered a secret in the title-deeds of the Nègrepelisse estates, and I tracked it through much correspondence."

At this point of his story the marquis began to speak without stuttering; his habit of repeating words and sentences ceased; for we all know that persons who in ordinary life exhibit those defects, get rid of them the moment that some real passion inspires their speech.

"The revocation of the Edict of Nantes took place, as you know, monsieur; but perhaps you do not know that to many of the court favorites it brought wealth. Louis XIV. gave to the nobles of his court the confiscated property of those Protestants who had not already sold what they owned. Some of the persons in favor at court, 'hunted,' as it was said, in those days, the Protestants. I discovered, during my researches, that the present fortune of two of our ducal families is composed of the confiscated estates of those unfortunate merchants. I need not explain to you, a man of law, the manœuvres employed and the traps laid for refugees who had property; it will suffice you to know that the former estate of Nègrepelisse, which included twenty-two steeples and many of the town rights, was then the property of a Protestant family. Alas! my grandfather recovered it by gift from Louis XIV. This gift was the result of acts of infamous iniquity. The owner of the property, thinking it was then safe to return to France, made a mock sale, left his family in Switzerland, and returned to France, intending, perhaps, to profit by all the delays granted by the

Edict. This man was arrested by order of the governor; the friend who had pretended to buy the property revealed the truth, the poor wretch was hanged, and my grandfather received his two estates. I wish I could be ignorant of the part my grandfather took in this affair; but the governor was his uncle, and I have, unfortunately, read a letter in which the uncle told him to apply to Deodatus, — a name agreed upon by courtiers to designate the king. That letter was written in a jesting tone, apropos of this crime, which filled me with horror. In short, monsieur, the sums sent by the exiled family to ransom the life of that poor man were kept by the governor, who then put his victim to death."

The marquis stopped, as if these memories were still too bitter for him.

"The name of that unfortunate man was Jeanre-naud," he resumed. "And that name will explain my conduct to you. I could not think, without the deepest sorrow, of the secret shame thus laid upon our family honor. That fortune enabled my grandfather to marry a Navarreins-Lansac, the heiress of the younger branch, then much richer than the elder branch of the Navarreins. My father consequently became one of the largest land-owners in the kingdom. He was able to marry my mother, a Grandlieu of the younger branch. Though ill-acquired, our property has been strangely beneficial to us! I resolved to repair the evil we had done. I wrote to Switzerland, and was soon on the traces of the Protestant family. I found that the present heirs, reduced to the utmost poverty, had left Fribourg and returned to France.

Before long I discovered in Monsieur Jeanrenaud, a lieutenant of cavalry under Bonaparte, the only remaining heir of that unfortunate family. To my eyes, monsieur, the rights of the Jeanrenauds were plain. But to what courts could they apply to recover them? Their court of justice was in heaven — or rather,” said the marquis, putting his hand on his heart, “it was here. I could not endure that my children should think of me as I thought of my father and my grandfathers; I wished to leave them an escutcheon without a stain; I could not suffer my nobility to be a lie. I found in Monsieur Jeanrenaud and his mother two persons of strict probity; to hear them you would think that they had robbed me. In spite of my urgency, they have only been willing to accept the value of their estates, such as it was at the time the king confiscated them. The sum agreed upon was eleven hundred thousand francs, which they insisted on my paying as convenient to myself and without interest. To do this, I was forced to lay by my income for many years. And here, monsieur, I come to the moment when I began to lose certain illusions which I had had on the nature and character of my wife. When I proposed to her to leave Paris and live for a time on one of my estates, where, with half her income, we could still live honorably and make this restitution (which I explained to her) far more rapidly, Madame d’Espard treated my proposal as if I were insane. I then, for the first time, discovered her true nature. She would have sanctioned without scruple my grandfather’s conduct, and would have laughed at the Huguenot’s death. Outraged by her

coldness and by her want of feeling for her children, whom she agreed to let me take without regret, I resolved to leave her her own fortune and my house. It was, after all, as she observed to me, not her place to assist in paying for my mad follies. Not having, therefore, enough to live upon and provide for the education of my children, I decided to bring them up myself and to make men of honor and gentlemen of them. By placing my property in the public funds I have been able to pay off my great obligation much sooner than I expected, because I profited by the great rise in such securities. Reserving four thousand francs a year for the subsistence of my sons and myself, it would have taken me eighteen years, paying sixty thousand a year, to free myself wholly; whereas, lately, I have been able to pay off the balance of the eleven hundred thousand francs that were due. Thus, I have the happiness of completing this restitution without doing the slightest injury to my children. I have now told you the reason for the payments I have made to Madame Jeanrenaud and her son."

"Then," said the judge, restraining the emotion which this statement caused him, "Madame la marquise knew the motives of your retirement?"

"Yes, monsieur."

Popinot shook his shoulders expressively, rose suddenly, and opened the door of the room.

"Noël, you can go," he said to his clerk. "Monsieur," he continued, "though what you have just said suffices to enlighten me, I should wish to hear your replies to certain other facts alleged in the petition. It seems that you have undertaken here a commercial

enterprise that is not in accordance with the habits of a man of your station."

"We cannot speak of that matter here," replied the marquis, making the judge a sign to follow him out. "Nouvion," he continued, to the old gentleman in the next room, "I am going down to my own rooms; the boys will be home soon; you 'll dine with us, won't you?"

"Then these are not your own apartments, Monsieur le marquis?" said Popinot, as they reached the staircase.

"No, monsieur. I hired those rooms for the enterprise you mentioned. See," he added, pointing to a poster on the wall, "this History is being brought out by one of the most distinguished publishers in Paris, and not by me."

The marquis then took the judge into the rooms on the ground-floor, saying to him: "These are my apartments, monsieur."

Popinot was naturally moved by the poetic charm, more found than sought for, which emanated from the very panels of the walls. The weather was magnificent; the windows were open; the air from the garden filled the salon with the scents of vegetation; the sunbeams brightened and played upon the wainscotings, otherwise too brown in tone. Beholding that scene, Popinot judged rightly that no insane man was capable of producing that sweet harmony, the influence of which came over him at once.

"I should like to have just such a home," he thought to himself. "Shall you soon leave this quarter?" he asked, aloud.



"I hope to," replied the marquis, "but I shall wait till my youngest boy has finished his studies, and the character of both my sons is formed before introducing them to the world, and placing them near their mother. Besides, after giving them the solid education they now possess, I want to complete it by making them travel through Europe and see men and things, and learn to speak the languages they have studied. Monsieur," he said, making the judge sit down in the salon, "I could not tell you about that Chinese publication before my old friend, the Comte de Nouvion, an *émigré* who returned to France without any means whatever of support, and with whom I engaged in this affair, less for myself than for him. Without letting him know the motives of my retirement, I told him I was, like himself, ruined; but that I had just enough to undertake a speculation in which he could be usefully employed. My former tutor was the Abbé Grozier, whom Charles X. appointed, at my request, librarian of the Arsenal library. The Abbé Grozier possessed an extraordinary knowledge of China, its history, and its manners and customs; he made me a sharer in it at an age when it is difficult not to be enthusiastic over the things we learn. At twenty-five years of age I knew the Chinese language, and I must own that I have never been able to divest myself of an extreme admiration for that people, who have conquered their conquerors, whose annals go back to a period incontestably earlier than the remotest mythological and biblical eras, who, by immutable institutions have preserved the integrity of their borders, whose vast public works are gigantic, their system of

administration perfect, who regard the *beau idéal* as a principle of art, and have carried luxury and industry to so high a degree that we cannot surpass it at any point; while they equal us in those things where we think ourselves superior. But, monsieur, allow me to say, that if I do, sometimes, jestingly compare China with the condition of our European states, I am not a Chinaman, I am a French gentleman. If you have any doubts as to the financial part of this enterprise, I can show you that we have two thousand five hundred subscribers to this literary, iconographic, statistical, and religious work, the importance of which has been very generally appreciated. As for me, I have had in view the possibility of giving my sons a few enjoyments. The money it has brought in has enabled me to pay for their fencing-lessons, their horses, their dress, their theatres, the various masters they have had, the canvases they daub, the books they want to own, — in short, all those youthful fancies which it gives a father such happiness to gratify. If I had been forced to deny such enjoyments to my poor boys, who have been so brave in their studies, the sacrifice I have made to the honor of our name would have been doubly painful. It is true, monsieur, that the twelve years during which I have retired from the world have cost me complete oblivion at court. I have abandoned my political career; I have lost my historical position, and the distinction that my own life and deeds might have bequeathed to my children; but our house has really lost nothing; my sons will distinguish it. If I am unable to obtain the peerage myself, they will win it, by devoting themselves to

the interests of their country and rendering her those services which can never be forgotten. So that in cleansing the past of our family I have really secured it a noble future. Is not that a glorious task to have done, though secretly, and with no outward glory attaching to it? Have you any other questions to put to me, monsieur?"

At this moment the noise of several horses was heard below in the court-yard.

"There they are," said the marquis.

Presently the two lads, whose dress was both simple and elegant, ran into the room, booted, spurred, and gloved, and gayly flourishing their whips. Their animated faces brought in with them the freshness and life of the outer air; they were sparkling with health. Both came up to press their father's hand, exchanging with him, as between friends, a glance of silent affection; then they bowed stiffly to the judge. Popinot reflected that it was quite unnecessary to question the father as to his relations with his sons.

"Well, have you amused yourselves?" asked the marquis.

"Yes, papa; and I hit the bull's eye six times in twelve shots, — the first time of trying!" cried Camille.

"Where did you ride?"

"To the Bois, where we saw mamma."

"Did she stop?"

"No, we were going so fast at the time that perhaps she did not see us," replied Clément.

"But you ought to have gone up and presented yourselves."



"I have noticed, papa, that she does n't like us to do so in public, — we are too big," added Clément, in a low voice.

The judge's ears were quick enough to hear the words, which caused a slight frown on the father's face. Popinot took delight in this little scene between the father and sons. His eyes, filled with a sort of tenderness, returned again and again to the face of the marquis, whose features, countenance, and manners presented the idea of honor in its noblest form, — high-minded and chivalric honor, nobleness in all its beauty.

"You — you see, monsieur," said the marquis, stuttering again, "you see that the law — the law may enter here — here at any time. If there is madness — madness it must be in the children, who are a little crazy about their father; though, indeed, the father is very crazy about the children. But it is a sane insanity, monsieur," he added, smiling.

At this moment the voice of Madame Jeanrenaud was heard in the antechamber, and the good woman made her way into the salon in spite of the remonstrances of the valet.

"I don't take four roads to get my ends," she was saying. "Yes, Monsieur le marquis," making a bow all round, "I must speak to you at once — *Parbleu!*" she cried, interrupting herself, "have I come too late? there's the police judge!"

"Police!" cried the two lads.

"There were mighty good reasons why I did n't find you at home," she continued, addressing Popinot, "since you are here. Ah, bah! the law is always

about when there's harm to be done. I've come, Monsieur le marquis, to tell you that my son and I have agreed to return you everything, because our honor is concerned in it. My son and I would rather give up everything than that you should be grieved. Faith! your people must be as stupid as jugs without handles to call *you* a lunatic!"

"A lunatic! our father?" cried the two boys, pressing up against him." "What does it all mean?"

"Hush, madame," said Popinot.

"Leave us, my children," said the marquis.

The two lads went into the garden without making any observation, uneasy though they were.

"Madame," said the judge, "the sums that Monsieur le marquis has paid you were legally due, though they have been paid in virtue of a sense of honor that is unusually high. If persons possessing confiscated property — no matter how acquired, perhaps treacherously — were compelled, after a hundred and fifty years, to make restitution, we should find few families owning legitimate property in France. The estates of Jacques Cœur enriched twenty noble families; the shameless confiscations of the English to the profit of their adherents, when England possessed a part of France, have made the fortune of several of our princely houses. The laws allow Monsieur le marquis to dispose of the income of his property even to giving it away, without exposing him to a charge of dissipation. The removal of a man from the managing of his estates as insane must rest on the absence of all reason in his actions. Now, in this case, the reason of the payments which have been made to you

is found in the most sacred of all motives, and the most honorable. Therefore, you can justly keep those payments and leave the world to basely interpret a noble act. In Paris the purest virtue is the object of the vilest calumnies. It is unfortunate that the present state of society should render this conduct of Monsieur le marquis sublime. I would, for the honor of our land, that such acts were matters of course; but customs and morals are now such that I am forced, by comparison, to regard Monsieur d'Espard as a man who deserves a crown rather than the threat of a lunatic asylum. During the whole course of a long judicial life I have seen and heard nothing which has so moved me as what I have this day heard and seen. But there is nothing extraordinary in finding virtue under its noblest form when put in practice by men of the highest classes. After thus explaining myself, Monsieur le marquis, I hope you will feel sure of my silence, and that you will have no further uneasiness about the judgment which will be rendered, — if, indeed, there should be any judgment."

"Come, that's right," said Madame Jeanrenaud, "there's a judge for you! Bless us! my dear monsieur, I'd kiss you if I was n't too ugly; you talk like a book."

The marquis held out his hand to Popinot, and Popinot gently struck his own into it, giving that great hero of private life a look full of penetrating sympathy, to which the marquis responded by a smile. The two natures, so full, so rich, one bourgeois and divine, the other noble and glorious, had softly met in unison, without the jar, without the excitement of emotion,

but gently, as if two rays of purest light had melted into one. The father of the pauper quarter felt worthy to press the hand of a man twice noble, and the marquis, in the depths of his soul, felt that the hand of the judge was one from which came, ceaselessly, the treasures of benevolence.

"Monsieur le marquis," said Popinot, bowing, "I am happy to tell you that after the first words between us I felt that the services of my clerk were not needed." Then he went closer to the marquis, and led him aside to a window, and said, in a low voice, "It is high time that you should go back to your own house and live there. In my opinion, Madame la marquise is acting under an influence which you ought to put an end to at once."

Popinot departed, but he looked back several times in the court-yard and in the street, moved by the memory of these scenes. They belong to those which implant themselves in the memory, to bloom again at certain times and seasons when the soul is in need of consolation.

"That apartment would suit me exactly," he thought to himself, as he reached home.

The next day, about ten o'clock, Popinot, who had written out his report the night before, set forth to the Palais with the full intention of doing prompt and signal justice. As he entered the robing-room to get his gown and put on his bands, the servant in charge of the room told him that the President of the Courts begged him to go to him at once, before he went to his own office. Popinot did so immediately.

"Good-morning, my dear Popinot," said the magistrate, taking him aside.

"Is the matter serious?" asked the judge.

"No, a mere trifle," replied the president. "The Keeper of the Seals, with whom I dined last night, took me aside after dinner. He had heard that you went to take tea with Madame d'Espard, in connection with a case which your chief-justice intrusted to you. He made me understand that it would be better if you were not allowed to sit in that case."

"Ah! monsieur, but I can prove that I left Madame d'Espard's house the moment that tea was brought in; besides, my conscience —"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted the president, "we all, the court, the Palais everyone knows *you*. I shall not repeat what I say of you to his Excellency. But you know, my dear Popinot, Cæsar's wife must not be suspected. We don't make this silly matter an affair of discipline, only of caution. Between ourselves, it relates less to you than to the interests of our court."

"But if you knew the sort of —" began Popinot, pulling his report from his pocket.

"I know perfectly well that you have shown the utmost independence in this affair. I, myself, when I was a judge in the provinces, I have often taken much more than a cup of tea with persons who had cases to be tried before me. But it suffices that the Keeper of the Seals has taken the matter up; the matter may get talked about, and it is all important that our courts should avoid such discussions. All conflict with public opinion is dangerous for constituted bodies, even if the right is on the side of the latter, because the weapons are not equal. Journalism can say all, and suggest all; but our dignity forbids



us to make any defence, or even reply. Besides, I have already conferred with the chief-justice of your court, and he has appointed Monsieur Camusot to take your place on this case. In short, I must ask you to relinquish it as a personal service to me. In return you shall have the cross of the Legion of honor, which has long been your due, and which I shall now make it my business to procure for you."

Beholding, at this moment, Monsieur Camusot, a judge recently promoted from the provinces to Paris, who advanced smiling and bowing to the president and judge, Popinot could not restrain a sarcastic smile. This pale and fair young man, filled with secret ambition, seemed ready to hang and unhang at the will of the kings of the earth, the innocent and guilty alike. Popinot retired, bowing to the president, and disdaining to defend himself farther from the lying accusation brought against him.

# **THE RURAL BALL.**



# THE RURAL BALL.

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TO HENRI DE BALZAC,

HIS BROTHER,

HONORÉ.

## I.

### A REBELLIOUS YOUNG GIRL.

THE Comte de Fontaine, head of one of the most ancient families in Poitou, had served the cause of the Bourbons with courage and intelligence during the war which the Vendéans made against the Republic. After escaping the dangers that threatened the royalist leaders during that stormy period of contemporaneous history, he said, gayly: "I am one of those who are fated to be killed on the steps of the throne." This little jest was not without truth, as to a man left for dead on the bloody day of the Quatre-Chemins.

Though ruined by confiscations, the faithful Vendéan refused the lucrative places which were offered to him by the Emperor Napoleon. Uncompromising in his religion of aristocracy he had blindly followed its axioms when he thought proper to take a wife. In spite of the offers of a rich revolutionary parvenu, who was willing to pay a high price for such an alli-

ance, he married a Demoiselle de Kergarouët, a girl without fortune, but whose family is one of the oldest in Brittany. At the time of the Restoration, Monsieur de Fontaine was burdened with a numerous family. Though he did not share the ideas of the greedy nobles who begged for favors, he yielded to his wife's request, left his country domain, the modest revenues of which barely sufficed for the needs of his children, and came to Paris. Shocked by the avidity shown by many of his old comrades for the places and dignities of the new régime, he was about to return to Poitou, when he received an official letter in which a well-known minister informed him of his appointment to the rank of brigadier-general, in virtue of the ordinance which allowed the officers of the Catholic armies to count the twenty years of Louis XVIII.'s exiled reign as years of service. Some days later the count received, without solicitation, the cross of the Legion of honor and that of the order of Saint-Louis.

Shaken in his resolution by these successive favors, which he thought he owed to the monarch's memory, he no longer contented himself with taking his family, as he had done religiously every Sunday morning, to the Salle des Maréchaux to shout "Vive le roi!" when the princes passed on their way to Mass; he asked the favor of a private audience. This audience, instantly granted, had, however, nothing private about it. The royal salon was full of old royalists, whose powdered heads, seen at a certain level looked like a carpet of snow. There, the count met with a number of his old companions in arms, who received him rather stiffly; but the princes were *adorable*, a term of

enthusiasm which escaped him when the most gracious of his masters, whom the count supposed to know barely his name, came up and pressed his hand, and called him the purest and most disinterested of the Vendéans.

But in spite of this ovation, none of these august personages thought of asking him the amount of his losses in their cause, nor that of the money he had generously poured out for the maintenance of the Catholic army. He found, too late, that he had made war at his own expense. Toward the end of the evening he thought he might risk a witty allusion to the state of his affairs. His Majesty laughed heartily; any speech that bore the stamp of wit was sure of pleasing him; but for all that, he replied with one of those royal jests whose soft speciousness is more to be feared than a reprimand. One of the king's confidential intimates soon after approached the Vendéan and let him know, in a guarded and civil manner, that the time had not yet come to make claims upon the masters, for there were others on the tapis whose services were of longer date than his. The count on this retired from the group which formed a semi-circle in front of the august royal family. Then, after disengaging his sword, not without difficulty, from the midst of the weak old legs which surrounded him, he made his way on foot across the court-yard of the Tuileries, to a hackney-coach which he had left upon the quay. With that restive spirit which characterizes the nobility of the *vieille roche*, in whom the memory of the League and the Barricades is not yet extinct, he grumbled aloud, as he drove along, on the change that was visible at court.

"Formerly," he said, "every man could speak freely to the king of his affairs; the seigneurs could ask at their ease for money and offices; but now it appears we cannot even ask without scandal for the sums we have advanced in his service. *Morbleu!* the cross of Saint-Louis and the rank of general are no equivalent for the three hundred thousand francs that from first to last I have spent on the royal cause. I *will* speak face to face with the king in his private cabinet."

This scene chilled the zeal of Monsieur de Fontaine, all the more because his requests for an audience were left without reply. He saw the intruders of the Empire successful in obtaining various offices reserved under the old monarchy for the best families.

"All is lost," he said, one morning. "The king has never been anything but revolutionary. If it were not for MONSIEUR, who never derogates from the true régime, and consoles his faithful followers, I don't know what would become of the crown of France. Their cursed constitutional system is the worst of all governments, and will never suit France. Louis XVIII. and Monsieur Beugnot ruined everything for us at Saint-Ouen."

The count, in despair, was again preparing to return to his country home, abandoning all his claims to indemnity; but, at that moment, the events of the 20th of March produced a new tempest, which threatened to engulf the legitimate king and his defenders. Like those generous souls who will not send out their servants in the rain, Monsieur de Fontaine borrowed money on his estate to follow the retreating monarchy, without knowing whether his emigration would stand

him in better stead than his former devotion. But, having observed that the companions of the king's former exile stood higher in his favor than those who stayed behind and protested arms in hand against the Republic, he may have considered that this journey into foreign lands would be more to his benefit than a perilous and active service in France. He was, therefore, to use the saying of our wittiest and ablest diplomatist, one of the five hundred faithful servants who shared the exile of the court to Ghent, and one of the fifty thousand who returned from it.

During this short absence of royalty, Monsieur de Fontaine had the luck of being employed by Louis XVIII., and of finding more than one occasion to give him proofs of great political sense and sincere attachment to his person. One evening, when the king had nothing better to do, he remembered the witty remark the count had made to him at the Tuileries. The old Vendéan did not let the opportunity slip; he related his history so cleverly that the king, who forgot nothing, was likely to remember it in due season. The royal literary man soon after noticed the graceful turn of phrase given to certain notes he had confided to the count to write for him; and this little merit, together with his wit, placed Monsieur de Fontaine in the king's memory as one of the most loyal servants of the crown. At the second Restoration the count was appointed one of the envoys extraordinary to go through the departments and pass judgment on the guilty actors of the rebellion; he used his terrible power moderately. As soon as this temporary jurisdiction was over he entered the Council of State, became a



deputy, spoke little, listened much, and changed considerably in his opinions. Certain circumstances, unknown to biographers, brought him into such intimate relations with the king that the witty monarch one day said to him:—

“Friend Fontaine, I shall never dream of appointing you to any post. Neither you nor I, if we were *employés*, could keep our places, on account of our opinions. Representative government has one good thing about it; it saves us the trouble we formerly had in getting rid of our secretaries of State. The Council is now a sort of wayside inn, where public opinion sends us queer travellers; however, we can always find some place to put a faithful servant.”

This somewhat satirical opening was followed by a special ordinance giving Monsieur de Fontaine the administration of a part of the Crown domain. In consequence of the intelligent attention with which he listened to the sarcasms of his royal friend, his name was often on his Majesty's lips whenever there was a commission to be created which offered a lucrative appointment. The count had the good sense to say nothing about the favors the king showed him; and he had the art of entertaining his royal master by a piquant manner of telling a story during those familiar conversations in which Louis XVIII. took as much delight as he did in political anecdotes, diplomatic cancons (if we may use that word in such connection), or the reading and writing of elegant little notes. It is well known that the details of his “governmentability,” as the august jester called it, amused him infinitely.

Thanks to the good sense, wit, and cleverness of the Comte de Fontaine, every member of his numerous family, young as they were, ended, as he said in jest to his master, by fastening like silk-worms on the leaves of the budget. His eldest son obtained an eminent place in the permanent magistracy. The second, a mere captain before the Restoration, received a legion on the return from Ghent, entered the Royal Guard, thence into the body-guard, and became a lieutenant-general after the affair of the Trocadéro. The youngest son, appointed first a sub-prefect, was soon after Master of Petitions and a director of one of the municipal departments of the city of Paris. These favors, given quietly, and kept as secret as the count's own favor with the king, were showered upon him unperceived by the public. Though the father and his three sons had each sinecures enough to give them a budgetary revenue that was nearly equal to that of a director-general, their political good luck excited no envy. In those days when the constitutional system was just established, few persons had any correct ideas as to the quiet regions of the budget, or the number of favorites who contrived to find there the equivalent of destroyed monasteries.

Monsieur le Comte de Fontaine, who had formerly boasted of never having read the Charter and had shown such displeasure at the eager avidity of courtiers, was not long in proving to his august master that he understood perfectly well the proper spirit and resources of a representative. Nevertheless, in spite of the careers opened to his three sons, Monsieur de Fontaine's numerous family was too numerous to

allow him to become a rich man all at once. In addition to his three sons he had three daughters, and he feared to wear out the bounty of the king. On reflection, he thought it better not to mention to his august master more than one at a time of these virgins, all waiting to light their lamps. The king had too much sense of the becoming to leave his work unfinished. The marriage of the first daughter with a receiver-general, Planat de Baudry, was arranged by one of those short royal sentences which cost nothing and bestow millions. One evening, when the king was sulky, he laughed on learning the existence of a second Demoiselle de Fontaine; nevertheless, he married her to a young magistrate,—of bourgeois descent, it is true, but rich, and full of talent, and he made him a baron. But when, the following year, the Vendéan let drop a few words about a Mademoiselle Émilie de Fontaine, the king replied, in his sour little voice:—

*“Amicus Plato, sed magis amica natio.”*

Then, a few days later, he presented his “friend Fontaine” with a rather silly quatrain, which he called an epigram, in which he teased him about three daughters produced so opportunely in the form of a trinity. If the chronicle be true, the monarch had made the unity of the three persons the point of his wit.

“Would the king deign to change his epigram into an epithalamium,” suggested the count, endeavoring to turn this freak to his profit.

“I don’t see the rhyme nor the reason of that remark,” said the king, harshly, not at all pleased at any joke about his poetry, however gentle it might be.

From that day his relations with Monsieur de Fontaine were less cordial. Kings like contradiction more than we imagine.

Émilie de Fontaine, like many youngest children, was the Benjamin of the family, and spoiled by everyone. The king's coldness was all the more distressing to the count because the marriage of this petted darling proved to be an exceedingly difficult one to carry through. To understand the obstacles in the way of it, we must enter the fine hôtel where the government official lodged with his family at the cost of the Civil List.

Émilie had spent her childhood on the Fontaine estate, enjoying that abundance which suffices to the pleasures of early youth. Her slightest wishes were laws to her sisters, brothers, mother, and even to her father. All her relations idolized her. As she reached girlhood at the very moment when her family were at the summit of fortune's favors, the enchantment of her life continued. The luxury of Paris seemed to her as natural as the wealth of flowers and fruit, and the rural opulence which had made the happiness of her earliest years. She had never been opposed in her childhood in satisfying her joyous fancies, and now, at the age of fifteen, when she was flung into the vortex of the great world, she found herself still obeyed.

Accustomed, by degrees, to the enjoyments of wealth, the elegancies of dress, gorgeous salons, and equipages became as necessary to her as the flattery, true or false, of compliments, and the fêtes and vanities of the court. Like many spoiled children, she tyrannized over those who loved her, and reserved her

coquetries for the persons who took least notice of her. Her defects grew with her growth, and her parents were soon to gather the bitter fruits of this fatal education.

At nineteen years of age, Émilie de Fontaine had not yet been willing to select, as her husband, any of the numerous young men whom her father's policy assembled at his fêtes. Although so young, she enjoyed as much freedom in society as though she were a woman. Her beauty was so remarkable that no sooner did she enter a room than she seemed to reign there; but, like kings, she had no friends, and no lovers; a better nature than hers, feeling itself the object of so much admiration, would not have repelled it as she did. No man, not even an old man, had nerve enough to contradict the opinions of a girl the mere glance of whose eyes roused love in a cold heart.

Brought up with a care that her sisters had lacked, she had various accomplishments; she painted fairly well, she spoke English and Italian, played on the piano remarkably well, and her voice, trained by the best masters, had a *timbre* which gave to her singing an irresistible charm. Witty by nature, and well-read in literature, she might have been thought, as Mascarrille says of people of quality, to have been born into the world knowing everything. She argued fluently about Italian or Flemish art, on the middle ages or the renaissance, and gave her opinion right and left on books ancient or modern, bringing out, sometimes with cruel cleverness, the defects of some work. The simplest of her remarks were received by an idolizing

crowd on their knees. She dazzled superficial persons; but as for wiser ones, her natural tact enabled her to recognize them, and to them she was so winning, so coquettish, that she escaped examination under cover of her flatteries. This attractive varnish covered an indifferent heart, an opinion, common to many young girls, that no one inhabited a sphere lofty enough to comprehend the excellence of her soul, and a personal pride based more on her birth than on her beauty. In the absence of the more ardent sentiments which, sooner or later, ravage the heart of woman, Émilie spent her youthful ardor in an immoderate worship of distinction, expressing the utmost contempt for everything plebeian. Very haughty toward the new nobility, she did her best to make her parents keep strictly to the social lines of the faubourg Saint-Germain.

This disposition in his daughter had not escaped the observing eye of Monsieur de Fontaine, who had more than once been made to wince under her sarcasms and witty sayings at the time of the marriage of her elder sisters. Logical minds might, in fact, be surprised to see the old Vendéan giving his eldest daughter to a receiver-general who had acquired possession of old seignorial property by confiscation; and the second to a magistrate too lately baronified to enable the world to forget that his father sold fagots. This notable change in the ideas of the count in his sixtieth year, a period when few men give up their fixed beliefs, was not due solely to a residence in the modern Babylon, where most provincials end by rubbing off their peculiarities; the new political conscience of the Comte de Fontaine was due far more to the counsels

and friendship of the king. That philosophical prince took pleasure in converting the Vendéan to the ideas which the march of the nineteenth century and the renovation of the monarchy demanded. Louis XVIII. desired to fuse parties as Napoleon had fused men and things; but the legitimate king, as wise, perhaps, as his rival, went to work in an opposite direction. The last head of the House of Bourbon was anxious to satisfy the *tiers état* and the followers of the Empire as the first of the Napoleons was eager to draw to himself the great lords and to endow the Church. Being the confidant of the king's thoughts, the councillor of State became insensibly one of the most influential and wisest leaders of the moderate party, who strongly desired, in the national interests, a fusion of opinions. He preached the costly principles of constitutional government, and seconded, with all his strength, the game of political see-saw which enabled his master to govern France in the midst of so many agitations. Perhaps Monsieur de Fontaine flattered himself that he should reach a peerage by one of those legislative gusts, the effects of which take the oldest politicians by surprise. One of the firmest of his acquired principles consisted in no longer recognizing any other nobility in France than that of the peerage, because the families of peers alone held the privileges.

"A nobility without privileges," he said, "is a handle without a tool."

Thus, equally far from the party of Lafayette as from that of La Bourdonnaye, he favored, ardently, the general reconciliation from which was to issue an

era of new and brilliant destinies for France. He tried to convince the families who frequented his salons, and those whom he visited, of the few favorable chances now to be found in a military or governmental career. He advised mothers to put their sons into industrial and other professions, assuring them that military employment and the higher functions of government must end in belonging constitutionally to the younger sons of peers.

The new ideas of the Comte de Fontaine, and the marriages which resulted of his two elder daughters, had found much opposition in the bosom of his family. The Comtesse de Fontaine continued faithful to the old beliefs, as became a descendant of the Rohans through her mother. Though she opposed, for a time, the marriage of her daughters, she yielded, after a while, as all mothers would have done in her place; but she insisted that her daughter Émilie should be married in a manner to satisfy the pride which she had herself developed in that young breast.

Thus the events which might have brought only joy to this household produced a slight leaven of discord. One of the sons married Mademoiselle Mongenod, the daughter of a rich banker; another chose a girl whose father, thrice a millionaire, had made his money by salt; the third had taken to wife a Mademoiselle Grossetête, daughter of the receiver-general at Bourges. The three sisters-in-law and the two brothers-in-law finding it for their interests to enter the salons of the faubourg Saint-Germain, agreed among themselves to make a little court around Émilie. This compact of self-interests and pride was not, however, so thor-



oughly cemented that the young sovereign did not occasionally excite revolutions in her kingdom. Scenes which good taste would have repudiated took place in private between the members of this powerful family, though they were never allowed to affect the outward show of affection assumed before the public.

Such were the general circumstances of the Fontaine household and its little domestic strife, when the king, into whose favor the count was expecting to return, was seized with his last illness. The great politician who had succeeded so well in piloting his wreck amid the storm was not long in succumbing. Uncertain as to the future, the Comte de Fontaine now made the greatest efforts to collect about his youngest daughter the *élite* of the marriageable young men. Those who have tried to solve the difficult problem of marrying a proud and fanciful daughter will understand the worries that came upon the poor Vendéan. If this event could worthily be brought about in a manner to please his precious child, the count's career in Paris for the last ten years would receive its final crown. His family, indeed, by the way it had invaded all departments of government, might be compared to the house of Austria, which threatens to overrun all Europe through its alliances. The old count therefore persevered against his daughter's objections, so much did he have her happiness at heart; though nothing could be more provoking than the way in which that impertinent girl pronounced her decisions and judged the merits of her adorers. It really seemed as if Émilie was one of those princesses in the Arabian Nights to whom all the princes of the earth were

offered; and her objections were equally grotesque and senseless; this one was knock-kneed, that one squinted, a third was named Durand, a fourth limped, and all were too fat. Livelier, more charming, and gayer than ever when she had just rejected two or three suitors, Émilie de Fontaine rushed into all the winter fêtes, going from ball to ball, examining with her penetrating eyes the celebrities of the day, and exciting proposals which she always rejected.

Nature had given her, profusely, the advantages required for the rôle of Célimène. Tall and slender, she was able to assume a bearing that was imposing or volatile, as she pleased. Her neck, a trifle too long, enabled her to take charming attitudes of disdain or sauciness. She had made herself a fruitful repertory of those turns of the head and feminine gestures which explained, cruelly or the reverse as the case might be, her smiles and words. Beautiful black hair, thick and well-arched eyebrows gave an expression of pride to her face which coquetry and her mirror had taught her to render terrible or to modify by the fixity or the softness of her glance, by the slight inflexion or the immobility of her lips, by the coldness or the grace of her smile. When Émilie wanted to lay hold of a heart she could make her voice melodious; but when she intended to paralyze the tongue of an indiscreet worshipper she could give it a curt clearness which silenced him. Her pure white face and alabaster forehead were like the limpid surface of a lake which is ruffled by the slight breeze, and returns to its joyous serenity as the air grows still. More than one young man, the victim of her disdain, had accused

her of playing comedy. In revenge for such speeches she inspired her detractors with the desire to please her, and then subjected them pitilessly to all the arts of her coquetry. Among the young girls of fashionable society none knew better than she how to assume a haughty air to men of talent, or display that insulting politeness which makes inferiors of our equals. Wherever she went she seemed to receive homage rather than courtesies, and even in the salon of a princess she had the air of being seated on a throne.

Monsieur de Fontaine perceived, too late, how much the education of his favorite daughter had been perverted by the mistaken tenderness of her family. The admiration which the world gives to a beautiful young woman, for which it often avenges itself later, had still further exalted Émilie's pride and increased her self-confidence. General approval had developed in her the selfishness natural to spoiled children, who, like kings, amuse themselves on all who approach them. At this moment the graces of youth and the charm of native talent hid these defects from ordinary eyes; but nothing escapes the eye of a good father, and Monsieur de Fontaine sometimes attempted to explain to his daughter the true meaning of the enigmatical pages of the book of life. 'A vain attempt! He was made too often to groan over the capricious intractability and sarcastic cleverness of his wayward girl to persevere steadily in the difficult task of correcting her warped nature. He contented himself, finally, with giving her kindly and gentle counsel from time to time; but he had the pain of finding that his tenderest words slid from her heart like water from polished

marble. It took the old Vendéan some years to perceive the condescending manner with which his petted child received his caresses.

But there were times when with sudden caprice, apparently inexplicable in a young girl, she would shut herself up and go nowhere; at such times she complained that social life separated her from the heart of her father and mother, she grew jealous of every one, even her brothers and sisters. Then, having taken pains to create a desert around her, the strange girl threw the blame of her dissatisfied solitude and self-made troubles upon life. Armed with her twenty years' experience, she railed at fate; not perceiving that the principle of happiness is within us, she cried aloud to the things of life to give it to her. She would have gone to the ends of the earth to avoid a marriage like those of her sisters, and yet in her heart she was horribly jealous on seeing them rich and happy.

Sometimes her mother — even more the victim of her proceedings than her father — was led to think there was a tinge of madness in her. But her behavior was otherwise explicable. Nothing is more common than self-assumption in the heart of young girls placed high on the social ladder and gifted with great beauty. They are often persuaded that their mother, now forty to fifty years old, can no longer sympathize with their young souls or conceive their wants. They imagine that most mothers, jealous of their daughters, have a premeditated design to prevent them from receiving attentions or eclipsing their own claims. Hence, secret tears and muttered rebellion against imaginary maternal tyranny. From the midst of these fancied

griefs, which they make real, they draw for themselves a brilliant horoscope; their magic consists in taking dreams for realities; they resolve, in their secret meditations, to give their heart and hand to no man who does not possess such or such qualifications, and they picture to their imagination a type to which their accepted lover must, willingly or not, conform. After certain experience of life and the serious reflections which years bring to them, and after seeing the world and its prosaic course, the glowing colors of their ideal visions fade; and they are quite astonished some fine day to wake up and find themselves happy without the nuptial poesy of their dreams. At present Mademoiselle Émilie de Fontaine had resolved, in her flimsy wisdom, on a programme to which a suitor must conform in order to be accepted. Hence her disdainful comments.

"Though young, and belonging to the old nobility," she said to herself, "he must also be a peer of France, or the son of a peer. I could never bear to see our arms on the panels of my carriage without the azure mantle, or be unable to drive among the princes at Longchamps. Papa himself says the peerage is going to be the highest dignity in France. He must also be a soldier, but resign, if I wish him to; and I want him decorated, so that sentries may salute us."

But the above qualifications would amount to very little, she thought, if this being did not also possess great amiability, an elegant manner, intellect, and a slender form. Slenderness, grace of body, fugitive though it might be, especially under a representative government, was absolutely indispensable. Made-

moiselle de Fontaine had a certain vision in her mind's eye which served her as model. The young man who at her first glance did not meet the required conditions never obtained a second.

"Oh, heavens! how fat he is!" was with her the expression of an abiding contempt.

To hear her, one would think that persons of honest corpulence were incapable of feelings, dangerous husbands, beings unworthy of existing in civilized society. Though considered a beauty at the East, plumpness was to her eyes a misfortune in women and a crime in men. These fantastic opinions amused her hearers, thanks to a certain liveliness of elocution. Nevertheless, the count felt that his daughter's pretensions would, sooner or later, become a subject of ridicule, especially to clear-sighted women of little charity. He also feared that as she grew older her fantastic ideas might change to ill-breeding; and he saw plainly that more than one actor in her comedy, displeased at her refusal, was only waiting for some unlucky incident to avenge himself. Consequently, during the first winter after the accession of Charles X., he redoubled his efforts, seconded by his sons and his sons-in-law, to fill his salons with the best marriageable men in Paris, trusting that at last this assemblage of suitors would put an end to his daughter's fancies, and force her to decide. He felt an inward satisfaction in having done his duty as a father; but no result appearing, he resolved to have a firm explanation with her, and toward the end of Lent she was summoned to his study.

She came in singing an air from the "Barbriere."

"Good-morning, papa. What do you want me for so early?"

The words were chanted as if they were the last line of the air she was singing; then she kissed the count, not with that familiar tenderness which makes the filial sentiment so sweet a thing, but carelessly, like a mistress, sure of pleasing, whatever she may do.

"My dear child," said Monsieur de Fontaine, gravely, "I have sent for you to talk very seriously about your future. It has now become a necessity for you to choose a husband who will make your happiness lasting —"

"My dear papa," replied Émilie, in her most caressing tones, "the armistice that you and I agreed upon as to my lovers has not yet expired."

"Émilie, you must cease to jest on a subject so important. For some time past all the efforts of those who love you truly, my child, have been directed to finding you a suitable establishment, and you would be guilty of the greatest ingratitude if you made light of the interest which I am not the only one to spend upon you."

Hearing these words, the young girl selected an arm-chair and carried it to the other side of the fireplace, directly opposite to her father, sat down in it with too solemn an air not to be sarcastic, and crossed her arms over a pelerine of innumerable snowy ruches. Glancing covertly at her father's anxious face, she said, saucily: —

"I never heard you say, papa, that the heads of departments made their communications in their dressing-gowns. But, no matter," she added, smil-

ing, "the populace are not punctilious. Now, then, bring in your bill, and make your official representations."

"I shall not always be able to make them, my silly child. Now listen to me, Émilie. I do not intend much longer to compromise my character for dignity, which is the inheritance of my children, by recruiting this regiment of suitors whom you send to the right-about every spring. Already you have been the cause of dangerous dissensions with certain families. I hope that you will now understand more plainly the difficulties of your position and mine. You are twenty-two years old, my dear, and you ought to have been married at least three years ago. Your brothers and sisters are well and happily established. I must tell you now that the expenses accruing from those marriages, and the style in which your mother keeps up this household, have absorbed so much of our property that I cannot afford to give you a dowry of more than a hundred thousand francs. It is my duty to make ample provision for your mother, whose future must not be sacrificed to that of her children; I should ill reward her devotion to me in the days of my poverty if I did not leave her enough to continue the comfort she now enjoys. I wish you to see, my child, that your dowry will not be in keeping with the ideas of grandeur you now indulge — Now, don't be sulky, my dear, but let us talk reasonably. Among the various young men who are looking for wives, have you noticed Monsieur Paul de Manerville?"

"Oh! he lisps; and he is always looking at his foot because he thinks it small. Besides, he is blonde, and I don't like fair men."



"Well, Monsieur de Beaudenord?"

"He is not noble. He is awkward and fat; moreover, he is so dark. It is a pity that pair could n't exchange points; the first could give his figure and his name to the second, who might return the gift in hair, and then — perhaps —"

"What have you to say against Monsieur de Rastignac?"

"Madame de Nucingen has made a banker of him," she said, maliciously.

"And our relation, the Vicomte de Portenduère?"

"That boy! who does n't know how to dance; besides, he has no fortune. Moreover, papa, none of those men have titles. I wish to be at least a countess, like my mother."

"Have you seen no one this winter who —"

"No one, papa."

"Then what do you want?"

"The son of a peer of France."

"You are crazy, my child!" said Monsieur de Fontaine, rising.

Suddenly he looked up as if to ask of heaven another dose of resignation; then, with a look of fatherly pity on the girl, who was somewhat touched, he took her hand, pressed it between his own, and said, tenderly: —

"God is my witness, poor, misguided girl! that I have conscientiously done my duty by you — Conscientiously, do I say? I mean lovingly, my Émilie. Yes, God knows that I have offered you, this winter, more than one honorable man whose character and morals were known to me as being worthy of my

child. My task is done. Émilie, from this day forth I leave you mistress of your own fate; and I feel both fortunate and unfortunate in finding myself relieved of the heaviest of all the paternal obligations. I do not know how long you may hear a voice which has, alas! never been stern to you; but it will never again say more to you than this: Remember that conjugal happiness does not depend as much on brilliant qualities or on wealth, as on reciprocal esteem and affection. Married happiness is, of its nature, modest and not dazzling. My daughter, I will accept whoever you may present to me as my son-in-law, but if you make an unhappy marriage, remember that you have no right to blame your father. I will not refuse to promote your wishes and help you; but your choice must be serious and definite. I will not compromise the respect due to my character any longer by promoting your present course."

Her father's affection and his solemn accents did really affect Mademoiselle de Fontaine sincerely; but she concealed her feelings, and sprang gayly on his knee, — for the count was again seated, and trembling with agitation. She caressed and coaxed him so prettily that the old man's brow began to clear, and when she thought him sufficiently recovered from his painful emotion she said, in a low voice: —

"I thank you for your great kindness, dear papa. Is it so very difficult to marry a peer of France? I have heard you say they were made in batches. Ah! you surely won't refuse me your advice?"

"No, my poor child, no; indeed, I will often say to you, 'Beware!' Remember that the peerage is too

new a thing in our 'governmentability,' as the late king used to say, for peers to possess large fortunes. Those who are rich want to become richer, and they are looking for heiresses for their sons wherever they can find them. It will be two hundred years before the necessity they are under to make rich marriages dies out. I don't need, I think, to warn a girl like you of the difficulties in your way. One thing I am sure of; you will never be misled by a handsome face or flattering manners to rashly attribute either sense or virtue to a stranger; you have your heart, like a good horseman, too well in hand for that. My daughter, I can only wish you good luck."

"You are laughing at me, papa. Well, listen. I declare to you that I will go and die in Mademoiselle de Condé's convent sooner than not be the wife of a peer of France."

She sprang from her father's arms and ran off, proud of being her own mistress, and singing, as she went, the *Cara non dubitare* in the "Matrimonio Segreto."

At dessert that day, Madame Planat, Émilie's elder sister, began to speak of a young American, the possessor of a great fortune, who was passionately in love with the girl, and had lately made her very brilliant proposals.

"He is a banker, I think," said Émilie, carelessly. "I don't like financial people."

"But, Émilie," said the Baron de Vilaine, the husband of her second sister, "you don't like the magistracy any better; so that really if you reject all men of property without titles, I don't see into what class you can go for a husband."

"Especially, Émilie, with your sentiments on fat men," added her brother, the lieutenant-general.

"I know very well what I want," replied the girl.

"My sister wants a noble name, a fine young man, a glorious future, and a hundred thousand francs a year, — Monsieur de Marsay, for instance," said the Baronne de Fontaine.

"I know this, my dear sister," returned Émilie. "I shall not make a foolish marriage, as I have seen so many people do. Now, to avoid, in future, these nuptial discussions, I here declare that I shall regard as a personal enemy any one who says another word to me about marriage."

A great-uncle of Émilie, a vice-admiral whose fortune had just been increased by twenty thousand francs a year through the law of indemnity, an old man of seventy, assumed the right of saying harsh truths when he pleased to his grand-niece, whom he idolized. He now remarked, as if to put a stop to the sharpness of the conversation: —

"Don't tease my poor Émilie; can't you see that she is waiting for the majority of the Duc de Bordeaux?"

A general laugh replied to the old man's jest.

"Take care I don't marry you, you old goose," retorted the girl, whose last word was fortunately lost in the hubbub.

"My children," said Madame de Fontaine, endeavoring to soften this impertinence, "Émilie, like the rest of you, will take her mother's advice."

"Oh, heavens! no; I shall take no one's advice but my own in a matter which concerns me alone," said Mademoiselle de Fontaine, very distinctly.

All eyes turned to the head of the family on hearing this speech. Every one seemed curious to see how the count would take such an attack on his dignity. Not only did the worthy Vendéan enjoy the consideration of the world at large, but, more fortunate than many fathers, he was greatly esteemed by his own family, all the members of which recognized the solid qualities which had enabled him to make the fortune of those belonging to him. He was therefore surrounded by that respect and even reverence which English families and some aristocratic families on the continent show to the head of their genealogical tree. Silence fell; the eyes of every one turned from the haughty and sullen face of the spoiled child to the stern faces of her father and mother.

"I have left Émilie mistress of her own fate," was the reply of the count, made in a deep voice.

All present looked at Mademoiselle de Fontaine with a curiosity that was mingled with pity. The words seemed to say that paternal kindness was weary of endeavoring to control a character which the family knew to be uncontrollable. The sons-in-law murmured disapprovingly; the brothers looked at their wives sarcastically. From that moment, none of them took any further interest in the marriage of the intractable girl. Her old uncle was the only person who, in his naval parlance, dared to board her, and he did, occasionally, receive her fire and return her broadside for broadside.

## II.

## THE BALL.

WHEN the summer season came (after the vote on the budget) this family, a true likeness of the parliamentary families on the other side of the British Channel, which have a foothold in all ministries and ten votes in the Commons, flew off like a covey of birds to the beautiful regions of Aulnay, Antony, and Châtenay. The opulent receiver-general, the husband of the eldest sister, had lately bought a country-seat in that vicinity, and though Émilie despised all plebeians, that sentiment did not lead her so far as to disdain the advantages of bourgeois wealth. She therefore accompanied her sister to her sumptuous villa, less from affection for the members of her family, who went with them, than from the rigid rule of good society, which imperiously requires all women who respect themselves to leave Paris during the summer season. The verdant meadows of Sceaux fulfilled these exactions of good taste and public duty suitably, and Émilie agreed to go there.

As it is doubtful whether the reputation of the rural ball of Sceaux has ever reached beyond the limits of the department of the Seine, it is necessary to give a few details on this hebdomadal fête, which threatened at that time to become an institution. The envi-

rons of the little town of Sceaux enjoys the reputation of delightful scenery. Perhaps, however, it is really commonplace, and owes its celebrity to the stupid ignorance of the Parisian bourgeoisie, who, issuing from the close and narrow streets in which they are buried, incline naturally to admire the plains of Beauce. Nevertheless, as the poetic woods of Aulnay, the hillsides of Antony, and the valley of the Bièvre are inhabited by artists who have travelled, by foreigners, by persons difficult to please, and by a number of pretty women who are not without taste, we may suppose that the transient Parisian visitors were right.

But Sceaux possesses another charm in addition to its scenery, not less attractive to Parisians. In the middle of a garden where many delightful points of view are obtained, stands an immense rotunda, open on all sides, the light and airy dome of which is supported by elegant pillars. This rural dais shelters a ballroom. It seldom happens that even the most conventional and proper of the neighboring proprietors and their families do not converge at least once or twice during the season toward this palace of the village Terpsichore, either in brilliant cavalcades, or in light and elegant carriages which cover with dust philosophical pedestrians. The hope of meeting there some women of the great world and being seen by them, the hope (less often betrayed) of meeting young peasant women as demure as judges, brings, Sunday after Sunday, to the ball of Sceaux, swarms of lawyers' clerks, disciples of Esculapius, and other youths whose fresh complexions are discoloring behind the counters of Paris. Quite a number of bourgeois mar-

riages are yearly planned to the sounds of the orchestra, which occupies the centre of the circular hall. If that could speak, what tales of love it might tell!

This interesting medley of classes made the ball of Sceaux, in those days, more spicy and amusing than other rural balls in the neighborhood of Paris, over which its rotunda, the beauty of its site, and the charms of its garden, gave it additional advantages. Émilie at once proclaimed her desire to "play populace" at this lively rural scene, and declared she should take an enormous amount of pleasure in it. Her family were astonished at this fancy for mixing in such a mob; but to play at incognito has always had a singular charm for persons of rank. Mademoiselle de Fontaine expected to derive much amusement from citizen manners; she saw herself leaving in more than one bourgeois soul the memory of a look or a fascinating smile; she laughed to think of the awkward dancing, and she sharpened her pencils in preparation for the scenes with which she expected to enrich her satirical album.

Sunday arrived to put an end to her impatience. The party from Planat made their way on foot to avoid giving annoyance to the rest of the company. The family had dined early. The month of May was a delightful season for such an escapade. Mademoiselle de Fontaine's first sensation was one of surprise at finding under the rotunda a number of persons dancing quadrilles who appeared to belong to the best society. She saw, indeed, here and there, a few young men who had evidently put their month's savings into the joy of shining for this one day; but, on the whole,



there was little of satire to glean and none to harvest. She was amazed to find pleasure arrayed in cambric so much like pleasure robed in satin, and the citizen female dancing with as much grace as the noble lady, sometimes with more. Most of the toilets were simple and becoming. Those of the assembly who represented the lords of the soil, namely, the peasants, kept in the background with remarkable politeness. Mademoiselle Émilie would have been forced to make a study of the various elements composing the scene before discovering the slightest subject of ridicule.

But, as it happened, she had no time for malicious criticism, no leisure to listen for those absurd speeches which satirical minds delight to fasten on. The proud girl suddenly met in the midst of this vast field a flower, — the comparison is in order, — a flower, the color and brilliancy of which acted on her imagination with the prestige of novelty. It sometimes happens that we look at a gown, a curtain, or a bit of white paper so abstractedly that we do not at first see some stain, or some vivid beauty which later strikes our eye as if it had just come to the place where we see it. By a species of moral phenomenon of the same kind, Mademoiselle de Fontaine now beheld in a young man the type of those external perfections she had dreamed of for years.

Seated on one of the common chairs which surrounded the dancing circle, she had carefully placed herself at the extremity of the group formed by her family party, so as to be able to rise and move about as she fancied. She sat there, turning her opera-glass impertinently on all around her, even those in her

immediate vicinity; and she was making remarks as she might have done in a gallery over portraits or genre pictures, when suddenly her eyes were caught by a face which seemed to have been placed there, expressly, in the strongest light, to exhibit a personage out of all proportion with the rest of the scene.

The stranger, dreamy, and apparently solitary, leaned lightly against one of the columns that supported the roof, with his arms folded, slightly bending forward as though a painter were taking his portrait. His attitude, though proud and full of grace, was entirely free from affectation. No gesture showed that he held his face at three-quarters, inclining slightly to the right, like Alexander and like Byron and several other great men, for the purpose of attracting attention. His eyes followed the motions of a lady who was dancing, and their expression betrayed some powerful sentiment. His slim and agile figure recalled the proportions of the Apollo. Fine black hair curled naturally on his high forehead. Mademoiselle de Fontaine, at her first glance, noticed the fineness of his linen, the freshness of his kid gloves, evidently from the best maker, and the smallness of a foot well-shod in a boot of Irish leather. He wore none of those worthless trinkets which a counter-Lovelace or the fops of the National Guard affect. A black ribbon, to which his eyeglass was attached, alone floated over a waistcoat of elegant shape. Never had the exacting Émilie seen the eyes of man shaded by lashes so long and so curving. Melancholy and passion were both in that face, the tone of which was olive, and the features manly. His mouth seemed

ready to smile and to raise the corners of its eloquent lips; but this expression, far from denoting gayety, revealed, on the contrary, a certain graceful sadness. There was too much future promise in that head, too much distinction in the whole person not to make an observer desire to know him; the most perceptive observer would have seen that here was a man of talent, brought to this village ball by some powerful interest.

This mass of observations cost Émilie's quick mind but a moment's attention, during which moment, however, this privileged man, subjected to severe analysis, became the object of her secret admiration. She said to herself, "He is a noble, — he must be." Then she rose suddenly and went, followed by her brother, the lieutenant-general, toward the column on which the stranger leaned, pretending to watch the quadrille, but not losing, thanks to an optical manœuvre familiar to woman, a single one of the young man's movements as she approached him. The stranger politely yielded his place to the new-comers and went to another column, against which he leaned. Émilie, more piqued at this civility than she would have been by an impertinence, began to talk to her brother in a raised tone of voice, louder than good taste admitted. She nodded and shook her head, multiplied her gestures, and laughed without much reason, far less to amuse her brother than to attract the attention of the imperturbable stranger. None of these little artifices succeeded; and then it occurred to Mademoiselle de Fontaine to follow the direction of the young man's glances. On doing so, she saw at once the cause of his absorption.

In the middle of the quadrille directly before her, a pale young girl was dancing, who was like those Scottish deities whom Girodet has painted in his vast composition of French warriors received by Ossian. Émilie thought at first she must either be or belong to a distinguished lady who had lately come to occupy a neighboring country-house. Her partner was a young man of fifteen, with red hands, nankeen trousers, blue coat, and white shoes, which proved that her love for dancing made her not difficult to please in the matter of partners. Her movements did not show the languor of her apparent feebleness; but a faint flush colored her delicate cheeks and was beginning to spread over her face. Mademoiselle de Fontaine went nearer to the quadrille in order to examine the young stranger when she returned to her place, while the *vis-à-vis* repeated the figure she had just executed. But at this moment the young man advanced, stooped to the pretty dancer, and said, in a masterful, yet gentle tone of voice, these words, which Émilie distinctly overheard:—

“Clara, my child, do not dance any more.”

Clara gave a little pout, nodded her head in sign of acquiescence, and ended by smiling. After the dance was over the young man took all the precautions of a lover in wrapping a cashmere shawl around the girl's shoulders, and making her sit away from the draught. Presently Mademoiselle de Fontaine saw them rise and walk round the enclosure like persons intending to take their departure, and she followed them hastily, under pretence of admiring the views from the garden. Her brother lent himself with malicious good-humor

to the various caprices of this vagabond ramble. Émilie soon perceived her elegant couple getting into a tilbury held by a groom on horseback, and at the moment when the young man gathered up the reins she obtained from him one of those glances that are aimlessly cast upon a crowd; next, she had the satisfaction of seeing him turn twice to look at her again. The lady did likewise. Was she jealous?

"I presume that now, having examined the garden thoroughly," said her brother, "we may return to the dance."

"I am willing," she answered. "Do you think that young girl can be a sister of Lady Dudley?"

"Lady Dudley may have a sister staying with her," replied the Baron de Fontaine, "but she can't be a young girl."

The next day Mademoiselle de Fontaine was possessed with a strong desire to ride on horseback. Little by little she brought her old uncle and her brothers to accompany her daily in certain early morning rides, very beneficial, she declared, for her health. She particularly delighted in the country about Lady Dudley's house. But in spite of her cavalry manoeuvres she did not find the stranger as promptly as her joyous hopes predicted. Several times she returned to the rural ball, but in vain. The stranger who had fallen from heaven to rule her dreams and adorn them appeared not again. Nothing spurs the dawning love of a young girl like an obstacle; but there was, nevertheless, a moment when Mademoiselle Émilie de Fontaine was on the point of abandoning her strange and secret quest, despairing of the success of an enterprise.

the singularity of which may give some idea of her daring character. She might, indeed, have ridden about the neighborhood indefinitely without meeting her unknown hero. Clara — since Clara was the name that Émilie had overheard — was not English; she did not belong to Lady Dudley's household, and the gentleman who accompanied her did not reside near the balmy groves of Châtenay.

One evening, as Émilie was riding alone with her uncle, who enjoyed a cessation of hostilities from his gout during the summer, she met the carriage of Lady Dudley. That illustrious foreigner was accompanied by Monsieur Félix de Vandenesse. Émilie recognized the handsome couple, and her past suppositions were dissolved like a dream. Provoked, like any other woman frustrated in her scheme, she turned her horse and rode so rapidly homeward that her uncle had all the trouble in the world to keep up with her.

"Apparently I'm too old to understand these young things," thought the old sailor as he urged his horse to a gallop. "Or perhaps the youth of these days is n't the same as it was in mine — But what's my niece about now? Look at her, making her horse take short steps, like a gendarme patrolling Paris. Would n't one think she was trying to hem in that worthy fellow, who looks like an author composing poetry? Yes, to to be sure, he has an album in his hand! Faith! what a fool I am! no doubt that's the young man we've been chasing all along."

At this thought the old sailor checked the speed of his horse so as to reach his niece as noiselessly as he could. In spite of the veil which years had drawn

before his gray eyes the Comte de Kergarouët saw enough to note the signs of some unusual agitation in the girl, in spite of the indifference she endeavored to assume. Her piercing eyes were fixed in a sort of stupor on the stranger, who was tranquilly walking in front of her.

"That's surely it!" thought the old gentleman. "She is making a stern chase of him, like a pirate after a merchantman. When she loses sight of him she'll be in a fine state at not knowing who he is, whether a marquis or a bourgeois. Ah! those young heads, those young heads! they ought always to have an old wig like me at their elbow —"

Suddenly he set spurs to his horse to startle that of his niece, and passed so rapidly between Émilie and the stranger that he forced the latter to jump back upon the grass that bordered the road. Stopping his horse, the count cried out: —

"Could n't you get out of the way?"

"Ah, pardon me," replied the stranger. "I was not aware it was my place to make excuses for your nearly knocking me down."

"Enough of that, friend!" returned the old sailor, gruffly, in a tone of voice which was meant to be insulting.

At the same time the count raised his whip as if to strike his horse, but he let the end of it touch the shoulder of the young man as he said: —

"The liberals always reason, and the man who reasons ought to be wise."

The young man jumped into the road on hearing the words, and said, in an angry voice: —

"Monsieur, I can hardly believe, seeing your white hair, that you still amuse yourself by seeking duels —"

"White hair!" cried the sailor, interrupting him; "you lie in your throat; it is only gray."

A dispute thus begun became, in a few seconds, so hot that the young adversary forgot the tone of moderation he tried to use. At this moment Émilie rode anxiously back to them, and the count gave his name hurriedly to the young man, telling him to say nothing more in presence of the lady who was intrusted to his care. The young stranger could not help smiling, but he gave his card to the old gentleman, remarking that he lived in a country-house at Chevreuse, after which he disappeared rapidly.

"You came near killing that poor fellow, niece," said the count, riding up to Émilie. "Why don't you hold your horse in hand? You left me to compromise my dignity in order to cover your folly; whereas if you had stayed on the spot one of your looks or civil words, which you can say prettily enough when you don't want to be impertinent, would have mended matters even if you had broken his arm."

"My dear uncle, it was your horse, not mine, that caused the accident. I really think you ought to give up riding; you are not half so good a horseman as you were last year. But instead of talking about trifles —"

"Trifles! the devil! Do you call it a trifle to be impertinent to your uncle?"

"— we had much better follow that young man and see if he is hurt. He is limping, uncle, see!"



"No, he is running. I gave him a good lesson."

"Ah! uncle, that was just like you."

"Stop, niece," said the count, catching Émilie's horse by the bridle. "I don't see the necessity of running after some shopkeeper, who may think himself only too happy to be run down by a pretty young girl and the commander of the 'Belle-Poule.'"

"Why do you think he is a shopkeeper, uncle? I think, on the contrary, that his manners are very distinguished."

"Everybody has manners in these days."

"Everybody has not the air and style of social life; I'll lay a wager with you that that young man is noble."

"You did n't have time to examine him."

"But it is n't the first time I have seen him."

"Ha, ha!" laughed her uncle; "and it is n't the first time you have hunted for him, either."

Émilie colored, and her uncle amused himself by leaving her a while embarrassed; then he said:—

"Émilie, you know I love you as my own child, because you are the only one of the family who keeps the legitimate pride of high birth. Ah! my little niece, who'd have thought good principles would have become so rare? Well, I wish to be your confidant. My dear little girl, I see you are not indifferent to that young gentleman. You know what that means. Therefore, let me help you. Let us both keep the secret, and I'll promise to introduce him to you in a salon."

"When, uncle?"

"To-morrow."

"But, my dear uncle, you won't bind me to anything?"

"To nothing at all; you can bombard him, set fire to him, make a wreck of him if you please. And he won't be the first, either."

"How kind you are, uncle."

As soon as the count got home he put on his spectacles, pulled the card from his pocket, and read the name, "Maximilien Longueville, rue du Sentier."

"You need n't feel uneasy," he said later to Émilie; "you can harpoon him in safety; he belongs to one of the great historical families, and if he is n't peer of France now he can certainly become so."

"What makes you think so?"

"That's my secret."

"Do you know his name?"

The count nodded his gray head, which was something like an old oak stump, around which a few autumn leaves were clinging. At that nod his niece ran to him to try the ever fresh effect of her coquetries. Learned in the art of cajoling the old sailor, she coaxed him like a child with the tenderest words. She even went so far as to kiss him, in order to obtain the important secret. But the old man, who passed his life in making his niece play such scenes, let her entreat and pet him for a long time. Presently she grew angry and sulked; then, under the spur of curiosity, she coaxed again. The diplomatic mariner first obtained her solemn promise to behave with more discretion, to be more gentle, less self-willed, to spend less money, and, above all, to tell him everything. This treaty being concluded and signed by a kiss

which he deposited on Émilie's white forehead, he seated her on his knee, placed the card before her eyes, with his two thumbs covering the print, and let her make out, letter by letter, the name of Longueville, obstinately refusing to show her more.

This event made the secret sentiments of Mademoiselle de Fontaine even more intense, and she spent the greater part of the night in picturing to her mind's eye the brilliant dreams with which she fed her hopes. Thanks to chance, so often invoked, Emilie now saw something besides a mere chimera in her visions of conjugal life. Like all young girls, who are ignorant of the risks of love and marriage, she was captivated by the deceitful externals of the two conditions. In other words, her sentiments were like other caprices of early youth, sweet but cruel errors which exercise a fatal influence on the existence of girls who are inexperienced enough to take upon their own shoulders the responsibility of their future happiness.

The next morning, before Émilie was awake, her uncle had ridden to Chevreuse. Finding in the courtyard of an elegant country-house the young man he had so wantonly insulted the night before, he went up to him with the affectionate politeness of the old men of the olden time.

"My dear monsieur," he said, "could any one believe that I should, at the age of sixty-three, get up a quarrel with the son of one of my oldest friends? I am a vice-admiral, monsieur; which is proof enough that I think no more of fighting a duel than of smoking a cigar. In my day, young fellows could n't be friends till they had seen the color of each other's

blood. But, *ventre-de-biche!* I had, you must know, taken a trifle too much grog aboard, and I ran foul of you. Shake hands! I'd rather receive a hundred rebuffs from a Longueville than give the slightest pain to any of the family."

Though at first the young man was inclined to be cold to the Comte de Kergarouët, it was impossible to hold out long against his hearty manner, and he allowed himself to be shaken by the hand.

"You are going out," said the count; "don't let me detain you. But, unless you have other plans, come and dine with me to-day at the Pavillon Planat. My nephew, the Comte de Fontaine, is a man you ought to know. And, besides, *morbleu!* I want to repair my rudeness by presenting you to four or five of the prettiest women of Paris. Ha, ha! young man, your brow unclouds! Well, I like young people, and I want to see them happy. Their happiness reminds me of those blessed days of youth when adventures were never lacking. Gay! oh, we were gay then, I can tell you. Nowadays, you reason, you worry about all sorts of things, as if there had never been a fifteenth or sixteenth century."

"But, monsieur, are not we right to do so? The sixteenth century gave Europe religious liberty only, whereas the nineteenth will give her poli —

"Stop, stop, don't talk politics. I'm an old foggy of an ultra. But for all that, I don't prevent young fellows from being revolutionists, provided they allow the king to disperse their meetings."

Riding on together a little way, the count and his companion were soon in the heart of the woods. The

old sailor selected a slim young birch, stopped his horse, pulled out a pistol, and sent a ball through its stem at forty paces.

"You see, my dear fellow, that I have no reason to fear a duel," he remarked, with comic gravity, as he looked at Monsieur Longueville.

"Nor I, either," said the young man, pulling out his own pistol. Aiming for the count's hole he put his ball close beside it.

"That's what I call a well brought-up young man," cried the count, with enthusiasm.

During this ride with the man he already regarded as his nephew, he found several opportunities to make inquiries as to those trifling accomplishments the possession of which constituted, according to his peculiar code, a finished gentleman.

"Have you any debts?" he asked, finally, after a variety of other questions.

"No, monsieur."

"What! you pay for what you buy!"

"Punctually, monsieur; otherwise we should lose our credit and standing."

"But of course you have a mistress? Ah! you blush, young man. How times have changed, to be sure! With these ideas of legality, Kantism, liberty, youth is spoiled. You have neither Guimard, nor Duthé, nor creditors, and you don't know heraldry! Why, my dear young friend, you are not *brought-up* at all! Let me tell you that he who does n't commit his follies in the spring is certain to commit them in winter. If I have eighty thousand francs a year at seventy it is because I ran through my capital at thirty — Oh!

with my wife, honorably. Nevertheless your imperfections will not prevent me from presenting you at the Pavillon Planat. Remember that you have promised to come, and I shall expect you."

"What an odd little man!" thought Longueville; "he is lively and robust, but — though he tries to seem kindly, I shall not trust him."

The next day, about four o'clock, as the family party were scattered about in the salons and billiard-room at Planat, a servant announced: —

"Monsieur *de* Longueville."

Having already heard of him from the Comte de Kergarouët, the whole company, even to a billiard-player who missed his stroke, gathered to see the newcomer, as much to watch Mademoiselle de Fontaine's face as to judge of the phoenix who had won the day in defiance of so many rivals. Manners that were full of ease, courteous politeness, a style of dress both elegant and simple, and a voice which vibrated to the heart of all hearers at once obtained for Monsieur Longueville the good-will of the whole family. He did not seem unused to the luxury now about him. Though his conversation was that of a man of the world, it was easy to see that he had received a brilliant education, and that his knowledge was solid and also extensive. He used, for instance, the proper technical word in a slight discussion which the count started on naval constructions, which led one of the women present to remark that he must have been educated at the École Polytechnique.

"I agree with you, madame," he replied, "that it is an honor to have been educated there."

In spite of much urging, he declined politely, but firmly, the urgent invitation of the family that he should stay to dinner; and he put an end to all remarks from the ladies by saying that he was the Hippocrates of a young sister whose delicate health required incessant watching.

"Monsieur is perhaps a physician?" said one of Émilie's sisters-in-law, rather maliciously.

"No, monsieur was educated at the École Polytechnique," interposed Mademoiselle de Fontaine, whose face had brightened with the richest tints on hearing that the lady she had seen at the ball was Monsieur Longueville's sister.

"But, my dear sister, a man can be educated at the École Polytechnique and yet be a physician. Isn't that so, monsieur?"

"Madame, the two things are not incompatible," replied the young man.

All eyes rested on Émilie, who looked with a sort of uneasy curiosity at the attractive stranger. She breathed more freely when he added, with a smile, —

"I have not the honor of being a physician, madame, and I have even declined an opportunity to enter the government service, in order to maintain my independence."

"And you did right," said the count. "But how can you call it an honor to be a doctor? Ah! my young friend, for a man like you —"

"Monsieur le comte, I feel infinite respect for all professions that are useful."

"I'll agree to that; you respect professions, I suspect, as other young men respect dowagers."

Monsieur Longueville's visit was neither too long nor too short. He withdrew at the moment when he had pleased every one and when the curiosity of all was fairly roused.

"That's a sly fellow," said the count, returning to the salon, after seeing the young man to the door.

Mademoiselle de Fontaine, who alone was in the secret of this visit, had made a somewhat choice toilet to attract the eyes of the young man; but she had the small annoyance of perceiving that he paid her less attention than she thought her due. The family were a good deal surprised at the silence into which she retired. Usually Émilie displayed her coquettish charms, her clever chatter, and the inexhaustible eloquence of her glances and her attitudes on each newcomer. Whether it was that the musical voice of the young man and the attraction of his manners had seriously charmed her, and that this real sentiment had given her a change of heart, it is certain that her behavior lost all affectation. Becoming simple and natural she was all the more beautiful. Some of her sisters, and an old lady, a friend of the family, saw a refinement of coquetry in this conduct. They supposed that finding a young man worthy of her she intended to show him slowly her charms, and then to dazzle him suddenly when her mind was made up.

Every member of the family was curious to know what the capricious girl thought of the stranger; but when, during dinner, they each took occasion to endow Monsieur Longueville with some fresh merit, Mademoiselle de Fontaine was mute until a slight sarcasm from her uncle roused her suddenly from her apathy;



she then said, in a pointed manner, that such celestial perfections must cover some great defect, and that for her part she should be careful not to judge of so clever a man at first sight.

"Those who please every one please no one in particular," she added; "and the worst of all defects is to have none."

Like all young girls who fall in love, Émilie fondly hoped to hide her feelings in her heart by misleading the Argus eyes that surrounded her; but at the end of a fortnight there was not a single member of this numerous family who was not initiated into her secret.

At Monsieur Longueville's third visit Émilie felt that she attracted him. This discovery gave her such intoxicating pleasure that she felt surprised at herself when she reflected on it. There was something humiliating to her pride in it. Accustomed to feel herself the centre of the world she lived in, she was now obliged to recognize a power which controlled her in spite of herself. She tried to rebel against it, but she was wholly unable to drive from her heart the seductive image of the young man. Then came uneasiness. Two characteristics of Monsieur Longueville were very unwelcome, both to the general curiosity and that of Mademoiselle de Fontaine in particular; namely, his discretion and his modesty. He never spoke of himself, or of his family, or his occupations. In spite of the traps which Émilie repeatedly laid for him in conversation, he managed to evade them all with the cleverness of a diplomatist who means to keep his secret. If she talked of painting, Monsieur Longueville replied as a connoisseur. If

she tried music, the young man showed, without conceit, that he could play the piano fairly well. One evening he delighted the company by blending his delightful voice with that of Émilie in one of Cimarosa's fine duets. But if any one attempted to discover whether he were an artist of any kind, he joked about his accomplishments with so much grace that he left these women, practised as they were in the art of divining such secrets, unable to discover the social sphere to which he belonged. No matter with what vigor the old admiral flung a grapnel to the vessel, Longueville managed to slip by it with a suppleness which preserved the charm of mystery; and it was all the more easy for him to keep his incognito at the Pavillon Planat, because the curiosity he there aroused never exceeded the limits of politeness.

Émilie, tortured by this reserve, fancied she might get more from the sister than from the brother, and she now attempted, with the help of her uncle, to bring that hitherto mute personage, Mademoiselle Clara Longueville, on the scene. The society at the Pavillon expressed an extreme desire to know so amiable a young lady and to afford her some amusement. An informal ball was proposed and accepted, and the ladies felt certain of getting the truth from a girl of sixteen.

In spite of these little clouds of doubt, a vivid light had entered the soul of Mademoiselle de Fontaine, who found a new and delightful charm in life when connected with another being besides herself. She began to conceive the true nature of social relations. Whether happiness makes better beings of us, or

whether her mind was too occupied to tease and harass others, it is certain that she became less caustic, gentler and more indulgent. This change in her character delighted the astonished family. Perhaps, after all, her selfishness was to turn into love. Merely to expect the arrival of her reserved adorer was joy. Though a single word of passion had never passed between them she knew herself loved. With what art she now enabled her unknown lover to display his accomplishments and the treasures of an education that was evidently varied. Conscious that she herself was being carefully observed, she felt her defects and tried to conquer those which her training had so fatally encouraged. It was indeed a first homage paid to love, and a bitter reproach which her awakened heart made to itself. The result was that, wanting to please, she fascinated; she loved, and was idolized.

Her family, knowing how amply her pride protected her, allowed her enough liberty to enjoy those little youthful happinesses which give such charm and such vigor to young love. More than once the young man and Émilie walked alone about the shrubbery of the park, where nature was decked like beauty for a ball. More than once they held those vague and aimless conversations the emptiest words of which conceal the deepest sentiments. Together they admired the setting sun and its glowing colors. They gathered daisies to pluck the leaves; they sang the passionate duets of Pergolesi and Rossini, using those notes as faithful interpreters to express their secret feelings.

## III.

## IN WHICH THE WORST COMES TO THE WORST.

THE day of the ball arrived. Clara Longueville and her brother, whom the footmen persisted in decorating with the particle, were the heroes of it. For the first time in her life Mademoiselle de Fontaine saw the triumph of another girl with pleasure. She lavished, in all sincerity, upon Clara, those pretty caresses and attentions which women often show to each other to excite the jealousy of men. Émilie had an object of her own, however; she wanted to obtain the secret. But Mademoiselle Longueville proved to have even more discretion and more cleverness than her brother, for she did not even seem to be reserved,—keeping the conversation away from personal interests, but giving it so great a charm on other subjects that Mademoiselle de Fontaine felt a sort of envy, and called her “the siren.” Though Émilie’s intention was to question Clara, it was Clara who questioned Émilie; she wanted to judge the girl, and the girl judged her; she was even provoked with herself for letting her real self appear in certain answers cleverly drawn out of her by Clara, whose modest and innocent air precluded all suspicion of malice. At one moment Émilie seemed really angry at having made an attack upon plebeians, which Clara herself had provoked.

"Mademoiselle," said the charming girl, "I have heard so much of you from Maximilien that I have longed to know you; and to know you must be, I think, to love you."

"Dear Clara, I was afraid I displeased you just now, in speaking as I did of those who are not noble."

"Oh, no; don't be troubled. In these days such discussions have no point; and as for me, I am outside of that question."

This answer gave Mademoiselle de Fontaine the utmost satisfaction, for she interpreted it as people interpret oracles, to suit themselves. She looked at Maximilien, whose elegance surpassed even that of her imaginary type, and her soul was filled with joy at the knowledge at last obtained that he was noble. Never did the two lovers understand each other so well as at this moment; more than once their hands trembled as they met in the figures of the dance.

Autumn came in the midst of fêtes and rural pleasures, during which the charming couple let themselves float upon the current of the sweetest of all sentiments, strengthening that sentiment in a thousand little ways which every one can imagine, for all loves resemble one another on certain points. Also they studied each other's characters, as much as persons can study each other when they love.

"Well, never did a fancy turn into a love-match so rapidly," said the old uncle, who watched the proceedings of the young pair as a naturalist watches an insect through his microscope.

The words alarmed Monsieur and Madame de Fontaine. The old Vendéan was not as indifferent to his

daughter's marriage as he had lately professed to be. He went to Paris to make inquiries, and obtained no results. Uneasy at such evident mystery, and before he could hear the result of certain inquiries he had set on foot in Paris, he thought it his duty to warn his daughter to behave with more caution. This paternal advice was received with a show of obedience that was evidently ironical.

"But at least, my dear Émilie, if you love him don't let him see it."

"Papa, it is true that I love him, but I shall wait for your permission to tell him so."

"But reflect, Émilie, that you don't know anything as yet about his family or his station."

"I don't mind that. But, papa, you wished to see me married; you gave me liberty to choose, and I have chosen — what more can you want?"

"I want to know, my dear, if the man you have chosen is the son of a peer of France," replied her father, sarcastically.

Émilie was silent for a moment. Then she raised her head, looked at her father, and said, with some anxiety: —

"Who are the Longuevilles?"

"The family became extinct in the person of the old Duc de Rostein-Limbours, who perished on the scaffold in 1793. He was the last scion of the last youngest branch."

"But, papa, there are several good houses descended from bastards. The history of France swarms with princes who bear the bar sinister."

"Your ideas seemed to have changed," said the old noble, smiling.

The next day was the last which the Fontaine family were to spend at Planat. Émilie, whom the advice of her father had a good deal disquieted, impatiently awaited the hour of young Longueville's usual visit, being determined to obtain some definite explanation from him. She went out alone after dinner, and made her way to a grove in the park where she knew her lover would be sure to search for her. As she went along, she thought over the best means of obtaining, without committing herself, a secret so important; a difficult thing to do. Until now, no direct avowal had sanctioned the feelings which united her to this man. She had, like Maximilien, enjoyed the delights of unspoken love, but proud as they were, it seemed as though both shrank from acknowledging their feelings.

Maximilien Longueville, in whom Clara had inspired certain well-founded suspicions on Émilie's nature, felt himself alternately driven onward by the violence of his passion, and restrained by the desire to know and test a woman to whom he was about to confide the happiness of his life. His love did not prevent him from seeing in Émilie the faults and prejudices which injured her youthful character; but he desired to know whether he was truly loved by her in spite of them, before speaking to her; he would not risk the fate of either his love or his life. He therefore maintained an outward silence, which his looks and attitudes and slightest actions contradicted.

On the other hand, the pride natural to a young girl, increased in Mademoiselle de Fontaine by the foolish vanity of her birth and beauty, prevented her from

meeting half-way the declaration which her growing passion sometimes urged her to bring about. Thus these lovers had instinctively understood their mutual situation without explaining their secret motives. There are moments in life when the vague gives pleasure to young souls.

Seated on a rustic bench, Émilie now thought over the events of these three enchanting months. Her father's doubts were the last fears that could touch her, and even these she set aside by arguments which to an inexperienced girl seemed triumphant. In the first place, she convinced herself that it was impossible she should be deceived. During the whole summer she had never detected in Maximilien a look, or word or gesture which indicated a vulgar origin or occupation; more than that, his manner of discussing topics proved that he was a man whose mind was occupied with the highest interests of the nation. "Besides," she thought to herself, "a clerk, a banker, or a merchant would not have leisure to spend a whole summer in making love to me in the fields and woods; he spends his time as idly as a noble whose life is free of care." Then she abandoned herself to a course of meditation far more interesting to her than these preliminary thoughts, and was thus engaged when a slight rustling of the foliage let her know that Maximilien was looking at her, no doubt with admiration.

"Don't you know that it is very wrong to come suddenly upon girls in that way?" she said, smiling.

"Above all when they are thinking about their secrets," replied Maximilien, slyly.

"Why should n't I have secrets?" she asked. "You have plenty of your own,"



"Were you really thinking of your secrets?" he said, laughing.

"No, I was thinking of yours. I know all about mine."

"But," said the young man, gently taking the girl's arm and placing it in his, "perhaps my secrets are yours, and your secrets mine."

After walking a few steps they reached a grove of trees which the setting sun was wrapping in a mist, as it were, of reds and browns. This natural magic seemed to give solemnity to the moment. The eyes of the lovers had never before told each other so many things that their lips dared not say. In the grasp of this sweet intoxication they forgot the small conventions of pride and the cold calculations of their mutual distrust. At first they could only express their emotions by clasping hands, and so interpreting their happy thoughts.

"Monsieur, I have a question to ask you," said Mademoiselle de Fontaine, after a long silence, in a trembling voice, as they slowly paced onward. "But remember, I entreat you, that it is, as it were, forced upon me by the situation in which I stand with my family."

A pause that was terrifying to Émilie followed these words which she almost stammered. During the moment that this silence lasted the girl, hitherto so proud, dared not meet the burning glance of the man she loved, for she was conscious in her heart of the baseness of the words she added:—

"Are you noble?"

When they had left her lips she wished herself at the bottom of a lake.

"Mademoiselle," replied Longueville, gravely, his face assuming a sort of stern dignity, "I will answer that question without evasion when you have answered with sincerity the one I now put to you."

He dropped the arm of the young girl, who suddenly felt alone in the world, and said, "Why do you question me about my birth?" She was motionless, cold, and silent. "Mademoiselle," he went on, "let us go no farther if we do not comprehend each other. I love you," he added, in a deep and tender tone. "Well, then!" he continued, on hearing the exclamation of joy which the girl could not restrain, "why ask me if I am noble?"

"Could he speak thus if he were not," cried an inward voice which Émilie believed to have come from the depths of her heart. She raised her head gracefully, seemed to gather a new life in the look the young man gave her, and held out her arm to him as though to make a new alliance.

"You must think I care much for worldly dignities," she said.

"I have no titles to offer to my wife," he replied, half in jest and half in earnest. "But if I choose her in the highest rank and among those who are accustomed to luxury and the pleasures of opulence, I know to what my choice obliges me. Love gives all," he added, gayly, "but to lovers only. Married people want more than the heavens above them and the velvet of the turf at their feet."

"He is rich," thought she. "As for titles, perhaps he wants to test me. They have probably told him I was fanatical about nobility, and would only marry a

peer of France. My cats of sisters may have played me just such a trick. I assure you, monsieur," she said aloud, "that although I have had exacting ideas as to life and society, I now," glancing at him in a manner to turn his head, "know where a woman should look for her real happiness."

"I trust that you speak sincerely," he answered, with gentle gravity. "Next winter, my dear Émilie, in less than two months, perhaps, I shall be able to offer you the enjoyments of wealth. What this means is a secret I am compelled to keep for the present. On its success depends my happiness; I dare not say *ours* —"

"Oh! say it, say it!" she exclaimed.

With many tender thoughts and words they slowly returned to the house and joined the company in the salon. Never had Mademoiselle de Fontaine seen her lover so lovable, so pleasing; his slim form, his engaging manners seemed to her more charming than ever. They sang together in Italian, with such expression that the company applauded enthusiastically. Their final adieu was made in a formal tone which covered a secret happiness. This day was to the young girl a chain which bound her more closely than ever to the destiny of the man she had chosen. The force and dignity he displayed in the scene we have just related, and in which their mutual sentiments had been revealed, may have inspired Mademoiselle de Fontaine with a sense of respect without which no true love exists.

Later in the evening, being alone with her father and uncle in the salon, the former came up to her,

took her hands affectionately, and asked if she had obtained any light as to the family and fortune of Monsieur Longueville.

"Yes, my dear father," she replied, "and I am happier than I ever thought to be. Monsieur de Longueville is the only man I ever wished to marry."

"Very good, Émilie," replied her father; "then I know what I must do."

"Do you know of any obstacle?" she asked, in real anxiety.

"My dear child, this young man is absolutely unknown; but, unless he is a dishonest man, he is dear to me as a son, because you love him."

"Dishonest!" cried Emilie; "oh! I am easy about that. My uncle, who introduced him to me, knows that much, at least. Tell me, uncle dear, has he ever been a pirate, a filibuster, a corsair?"

"Ah! I knew I should come to this!" exclaimed the old sailor, waking up from a nap.

He looked about the salon, but his niece had disappeared, — like Castor and Pollux, to use one of his own expressions.

"Well, uncle," said Monsieur de Fontaine, "why have you hidden from us all this time what you know of this young man? You must have seen what was going on. Is Monsieur de Longueville of good family?"

"I don't know him from Adam," cried the admiral. "Trusting to the tact of that wilful girl I brought her the Saint-Preux she wanted, by means known to myself alone. All I know about the lad is that he is a fine shot, hunts well, plays a marvellous game of bil-

liards, also chess and backgammon; and he fences and rides like the Chevalier de Saint-Georges. Also he has a most amazing erudition about vineyards; and he can cipher like Barême, and draws and dances and sings well. What the devil do you want else? If that is n't all a perfect gentleman need be, show me a bourgeois who knows as much, or a man who lives more nobly than he. You see for yourself he does n't do anything. Does he compromise his dignity in an office, and bow down to parvenus, as you call directors-general? No, he walks erect. He's a man. But here, by the bye, in the pocket of my waistcoat is the card he gave me when he thought, poor innocent! that I wanted to cut his throat. Ha! young men nowadays have n't any tricks in their bag. Here's the card."

"Rue du Sentier, number 5," said Monsieur de Fontaine, trying to remember that address among the various pieces of information he had obtained from his inquiries. "What the devil does that mean? Palma, Werbrust and company, wholesale dealers in muslins, calicos, and printed cottons of all kinds live there — Ah! I have it! Longueville, the deputy, has an interest in that firm. Yes, but I know Longueville has a son thirty-two years old, not the least like this man, to whom he has just given fifty thousand a year in order to marry him to the daughter of a minister; he wants to be made a peer like all the rest. I never heard him mention a son called Maximilien. And he has n't a daughter, so far as I know. Who is this Clara? Besides, it is open to any adventurer to call himself Longueville, or anything else he likes. I'll make some inquiries about Palma and Werbrust."

"You talk as if you held the stage alone," cried the old admiral. "Do you count me for nothing? Don't you know that if he is a gentleman I've got more than one sack in my lockers to repair his lack of fortune?"

"As for that, if he is Longueville the deputy's son, he needs nothing; but," added Monsieur de Fontaine, shaking his head from right to left, "he has n't even bought a property which carries a title. Before the Revolution he was only an attorney, and the *de* he has stuck on since the Restoration no more belongs to him than one half of his wealth."

"Ah, bah! happy those whose fathers were hanged!" cried the old sailor, gayly.

Three or four days later, on one of those fine days in November when Parisians find the pavement of their boulevard cleansed by a slight touch of frost, Mademoiselle de Fontaine, wearing a set of new furs which she wished to make the fashion, had gone out shopping with two of her sisters-in-law, the two whom she was most inclined to ridicule. The three ladies were induced to make this expedition less to exhibit an elegant new carriage and dresses in the latest style, than to see a certain pelerine that one of their friends had remarked in the large lace and linen shop at the corner of the rue de la Paix.

As the three sisters entered the shop the Baronne de Fontaine pulled Émilie by the sleeve and pointed out to her Maximilien Longueville behind the counter, occupied at that moment in receiving money from the mistress of the shop, with whom he seemed to be conferring. In his hand he held several patterns which left no doubt as to the nature of his occupation.

Émilie was seized with a cold shudder, fortunately unperceived. Thanks to the *savoir-vivre* of good society, she hid the fury in her heart and replied to her sister with the words, "I knew it," in a richness of tone and with an inimitable accent which might have made the fortune of an actress on the stage.

She advanced to the counter; Longueville raised his head, put the patterns in his pocket with perfect self-possession, bowed to Mademoiselle de Fontaine, and came out to meet her, giving her, as he did so, a penetrating look.

"Madame," he said to the mistress of the shop, who had followed anxiously, "I will send the money for this bill. My firm prefers to do business in that way. But here," he added, in a whisper, "is a thousand-franc note — take it; we will settle the matter between us later. You will, I hope, pardon me, mademoiselle," he said, turning back to Émilie, "and be so kind as to excuse the tyranny of business."

"It seems to me, monsieur, that the matter is one to which I am totally indifferent," replied Mademoiselle de Fontaine, looking at him with a vacant air which might have led a spectator to think she saw him for the first time.

"Are you speaking seriously?" asked Maximilien, in a broken voice.

For all answer Émilie turned her back upon him with inconceivable rudeness. These few words, said in a low voice, had escaped the notice of the sisters-in-law. When, after having purchased the pelerine, the three ladies returned to their carriage, Émilie, who was sitting on the front seat, could not refrain from glanc-

ing into the depths of that odious shop, where she saw Maximilien standing with his arms crossed, in the attitude of a man superior to the trouble which had come upon him so suddenly. Their eyes met, and each gave to the other an implacable look. Each hoped to cruelly wound the other's heart. In a moment they found themselves as far apart as if one were in China, the other in Greenland. The breath of worldliness had withered all!

A prey to the most violent struggle that ever went on in the heart of a young girl, Mademoiselle de Fontaine gathered the amplest harvest of bitter fruits which prejudice and pettiness ever sowed in a human soul. Her face, fresh and velvety a few moments earlier, was furrowed with yellow tones and red stains, and even the white of her cheeks turned greenish. In the hope of hiding her trouble from her sisters she ridiculed the passers in the street or laughed at a costume; but the laugh was convulsive. She was more deeply wounded by the silent compassion of her sisters than she would have been by the sharpest sarcasms which she might have revenged. She taxed her whole mind to drag them into a conversation in which she vented her anger in senseless paradoxes of the worst taste. On reaching home she became really ill, and was seized with a fever which at first showed dangerous symptoms. At the end of a month, however, the care of her family and her physician restored her entirely. Every one hoped that the lesson would subdue her self-will; but she declared there was no shame in having made a mistake, and she once more flung herself into society and returned to her former habits of life. If,



she said, she had, like her father, influence in the Chamber, she would pass a law that all merchants and shopkeepers should be branded on the forehead, like the sheep of Berry, to the third generation; it was a great injury to the monarchy that there was no visible difference between a merchant and a peer of France.

A hundred other such jests were poured out rapidly when any unforeseen accident started the topic. But those who loved her were conscious through her sarcasms of a tone of melancholy. Evidently Maximilien Longueville still reigned at the bottom of that inexplicable heart. Sometimes she would be gentle and sweet as she had been during the brief period when her love was born, and then again she would make herself intolerable. Her family excused these variations of temper, knowing that they had their rise in sufferings known and unknown. The Comte de Kergarouët alone obtained some slight control over her, and this was partly by gifts and amusements, a species of consolation which seldom misses its effect on a Parisian girl.

The first ball that Mademoiselle de Fontaine went to that winter was at the house of the Neapolitan ambassador. As she was taking her place in a quadrille she saw, not far from her, Maximilien Longueville, who nodded slightly to her partner.

"Is that young man a friend of yours?" she asked, disdainfully.

"Only my brother," he replied.

Émilie could not help trembling.

"Ah!" continued her partner in a tone of enthusiasm, "he is the noblest soul in the world —"

"Do you know my name?" asked Émilie, interrupting him, hastily.

"No, mademoiselle. It is a crime, I know, not to recollect a name which must be on every lip, or, I should say, in every heart; but my excuse is that I have just returned from Germany. My ambassador, who is in Paris on leave of absence, has sent me here this evening to serve as chaperon to his amiable wife, whom you can see over there in a corner."

"A tragic muse," said Émilie, after examining the ambassador.

"But that's her ball face," returned the young diplomat, laughing. "I must ask her to dance; that's why I take my consolation now." Mademoiselle de Fontaine made him a little bow. "I am so surprised," continued the chattering secretary, "to see my brother here. On arriving from Vienna I was told he was ill in bed, and I wanted to go to him at once; but diplomacy and politics leave no time for family affections. *La padrona della casa* keeps me in attendance, and gives me no chance to see my poor Maximilien."

"Is your brother, like yourself, in diplomacy?" said Émilie.

"No," said the secretary, sighing. "The poor fellow has sacrificed himself to me. He and my sister Clara have renounced their share of my father's property to make an entail for me. My father is a deputy and expects a peerage for his services to the government. He has the promise of it," added the young man, in a low voice. "My brother, after getting together a little capital, chiefly from our mother's property, has gone into a banking business, and he has just made a speculation in Brazil which is likely to make him a millionaire. I am very happy in the

thought that I have helped him by my diplomatic relations to this success. I am now expecting a despatch from Brazil which I feel sure will clear that gloomy brow of his. Don't you think him handsome?"

"His face does n't seem to me that of a man who spends his thoughts on making money," she replied.

The young diplomatist gave a glance at the seemingly calm face of his partner.

"Ah!" said he, "so young ladies can detect the thoughts of love beneath all foreheads!"

"Is your brother in love?" asked Émilie, in a tone of curiosity.

"Yes. My sister Clara, whom he cares for like a mother, wrote me that he had fallen in love with a very pretty girl; but I have had no further news of the affair. Would you believe it, the poor fellow used to get up at five in the morning so as to get through his business and ride out into the country, where the lady was staying. He ruined a fine thorough-bred horse I had sent him. Forgive my chatter, mademoiselle, I am just from Germany, where I have n't heard a word of pure French spoken; I am so hungry for French faces and sick of Germans that I'd talk, I believe, to the griffins on a candlestick. Besides, the fault is yours, mademoiselle; you asked me about my brother, and when I get on that subject I am irrepressible. I should like to tell the whole earth how good and generous he is. He has given up a hundred thousand francs a year to me from our estates at Longueville."

If Mademoiselle de Fontaine obtained all this information she owed it partly to the cleverness with which she questioned her confiding partner.

"How can you bear to see your brother selling calico and muslins?" asked Émilie, as they finished the third figure of the quadrille.

"How do you know he does?" asked the diplomatist. "Thank heaven! if I do rattle off a flux of words I have learned to say no more than I choose, like the other fledgling diplomatists of my acquaintance."

"I assure you that you told me so."

Monsieur de Longueville looked at Mademoiselle de Fontaine with a surprise that was full of intelligence.

A suspicion entered his mind. He glanced from his partner to his brother, and guessed all; he clapped his hands together, threw up his eyes and began to laugh: —

"I am nothing but a fool," he said. "You are the handsomest person here, my brother is watching you furtively, he is dancing in spite of his illness, and you are pretending not to see him! Make him happy," he added, as he took her back to her old uncle. "I'll not be jealous; though perhaps I shall wince a little at calling you my sister."

However, the two lovers were resolved on being inexorable. About two in the morning a collation was served in a vast gallery, where, in order to allow persons of the same set to be together, the tables were arranged as they are at a restaurant. By one of those accidents which are always happening to lovers Mademoiselle de Fontaine found herself placed at a table adjoining that around which sat some very distinguished persons. Maximilien was among them. Émilie listened with attentive ears to the talk of these neighbors. The companion of the young merchant

was a Neapolitan duchess of great beauty, and the intimacy that he affected to have with her was all the more wounding to Mademoiselle de Fontaine because at that moment she was conscious of a tenfold deeper tenderness for her lover than she had ever felt before.

"Yes, monsieur, in my country, true love can make all kinds of sacrifices," the duchess was saying in a mincing way.

"You Italians are far more loving than Frenchwomen," said Maximilien, looking full at Émilie. "They are all vanity."

"Monsieur," said Émilie, quickly, "it is an ill thing to calumniate your country. Devotion belongs to all lands."

"Do you think, mademoiselle," said the duchess, with a sarcastic smile, "that a Parisian woman would be capable of following her lover everywhere?"

"Ah! understand me, madame; she would follow him to the desert and live in tents, but not behind the counter of a shop."

Émilie emphasized these words with a gesture of disdain. Thus the influence exercised over the girl by her fatal education killed her dawning happiness twice, and made her life a failure. The apparent coldness of Maximilien and the smile of a woman, drew from her a sarcasm the treacherous delight of which she could not deny herself.

"Mademoiselle," said Longueville, in a low voice, under cover of the noise the women made when rising from table, "no one will ever offer more ardent wishes for your happiness than I. Permit me to give you this

assurance on taking leave of you. I start in a few days for Italy."

"With a duchess, I suppose."

"No, mademoiselle, with what may prove a mortal illness."

"Is that a fancy?" asked Émilie, giving him an uneasy glance.

"No," he answered, "for there are wounds that never heal."

"You will not go," said the imperious young girl, with a smile.

"I shall go," returned Longueville, gravely.

"You will find me married on your return, I warn you," she said, coquettishly.

"I hope so."

"Impertinent man!" she said to herself; "he takes a cruel vengeance."

A fortnight later Maximilien Longueville started with his sister Clara for the balmy and poetic regions of *la bella Italia*, leaving Mademoiselle de Fontaine a victim to bitter regrets. The young secretary of legation took up his brother's quarrel, and revenged him publicly by telling everywhere the reasons for the rupture. The Comte de Fontaine was obliged to use his credit at court to obtain for Auguste Longueville a mission to Russia to protect his daughter from the ridicule this young and dangerous persecutor heaped upon her.

Not long after, the administration was compelled to make a new batch of peers to strengthen the aristocratic body in the Upper Chamber, which was beginning to totter under the voice of an illustrious writer;

among them appeared the name of Monsieur de Longueville, the father, with the rank of viscount. Monsieur de Fontaine was also raised to the peerage, a reward due to his devotion during the dark days, and also to his name, which was lacking to the roll of the hereditary Chamber.

About this time Émilie, who had now attained her majority, made, in all probability, some serious reflections upon life; for she changed completely in tone and manner. Instead of saying ill-natured things to her uncle, she began to show him the most affectionate attentions; she brought him his crutch with a persistent tenderness which made the family laugh, she gave him her arm, she went to drive in his coach, and took walks with him daily. She even persuaded him that she liked the smell of his pipe, and read his dear "Quotidienne" aloud to him in the midst of clouds of tobacco smoke which the mischievous old fellow would sometimes puff at her intentionally. She learned piquet to play with him, and she, so fastidious, listened without impatience to his ever-recurring tales of the famous fight of the "Belle Poule," the manœuvring of the "Ville de Paris," the first expedition of Monsieur de Suffren, or the battle of Aboukir. Though the old admiral was fond of saying that he knew his latitude and longitude too well for any young corvette to overhaul him, the salons of Paris were startled one fine morning by the news that Mademoiselle de Fontaine had married the Comte de Kergarouët.

The young countess gave splendid fêtes to divert her mind; but she soon found the hollowness of her vortex; luxury was a poor cover to the emptiness and

misery of her suffering soul; in spite of her feigned gayety, her beautiful features expressed, for the most part, a dull melancholy. She always, however, paid great attention to her old husband, and her whole conduct was so severely proper that the most ill-natured critic could find nothing to reprimand. Observers thought that the admiral had reserved the right of disposing of his fortune so as to hold his wife the more securely; but this supposition was unjust both to the uncle and to the niece. Their demeanor to each other was so judiciously managed that those most interested were unable to decide whether the old count treated his wife as a father or as a husband; though the admiral was heard to say, on more than one occasion, that he had saved his niece from a wreck; and that in former times at sea he had never abused his rights over a shipwrecked enemy who fell into his hands.

Though the countess aspired to reign in Parisian society, and successfully endeavored to hold her own against the duchesses de Maufrigneuse and de Chau-lieu, the marquises d'Espard and d'Aiglemont, the countesses Féraud, de Montcornet, de Restand, Madame de Camps and Mademoiselle des Touches, she did not yield to the love of the young Vicomte de Portenduère, who made her his idol.

Two years after her marriage, being in one of the oldest salons of the faubourg Saint-Germain, Émilie heard the name of Monsieur le Vicomte de Longueville announced. Her emotion passed unperceived in the corner of the salon where she was playing piquet with the Bishop of Persépolis. Turning her head, she saw her former lover enter the room in the glow of youth



and distinction. The death of his father, and that of his brother (killed by the climate of St. Petersburg) had placed upon his head the hereditary plumes of the peerage; his fortune was equal to his station and his acquirements; only the evening before, his fiery eloquence had electrified the Chamber. At this moment he appeared before the eyes of the sad countess, free, and adorned with all the advantages she had formerly demanded in her ideal lover; and more than all, Émilie knew well that the Vicomte de Longueville possessed that firmness of character in which a woman of sense sees the strongest pledge of happiness. She cast her eyes upon the admiral, who, to use his own expression, was likely to swing at anchor for a long time to come, and she cursed the follies and errors of her youth.

Just then Monsieur de Persépolis remarked with his episcopal grace, —

“My dear lady, you have thrown away the king of hearts, and I win. But don’t regret your money; I keep it for my ragged schools.”

THE END.

**Balzac in English.**

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**MEMOIRS OF TWO YOUNG MARRIED WOMEN.**

BY HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

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"THERE are," says Henry James in one of his essays, "two writers in Balzac, — the spontaneous one and the reflective one, the former of which is much the more delightful, while the latter is the more extraordinary." It is the reflective Balzac, the Balzac with a theory, whom we get in the "*Deux Jeunes Mariées*," now translated by Miss Wormeley under the title of "*Memoirs of Two Young Married Women*." The theory of Balzac is that the marriage of convenience, properly regarded, is far preferable to the marriage simply from love, and he undertakes to prove this proposition by contrasting the careers of two young girls who have been fellow-students at a convent. One of them, the ardent and passionate Louise de Chaulieu, has an intrigue with a Spanish refugee, finally marries him, kills him, as she herself confesses, by her perpetual jealousy and exaction, mourns his loss bitterly, then marries a golden-haired youth, lives with him in a dream of ecstasy for a year or so, and this time kills herself through jealousy wrongfully inspired. As for her friend, Renée de Maucombe, she dutifully makes a marriage to please her parents, calculates coolly beforehand how many children she will have and how they shall be trained; insists, however, that the marriage shall be merely a civil contract till she and her husband find that their hearts are indeed one; and sees all her brightest visions realized, — her Louis an ambitious man for her sake and her children truly adorable creatures. The story, which is told in the form of letters, fairly scintillates with brilliant sayings, and is filled with eloquent discourses concerning the nature of love, conjugal and otherwise. Louise and Renée are both extremely sophisticated young women, even in their teens; and those who expect to find in their letters the demure innocence of the Anglo-Saxon type will be somewhat astonished. The translation, under the circumstances, was rather a daring attempt, but it has been most felicitously done. — *The Beacon*.

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Balzac in English.

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# THE VILLAGE RECTOR.

BY HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

Translated by KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY. 12mo.  
Half Russia. Price, \$1.50.

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ONCE more that wonderful acquaintance which Balzac had with all callings appears manifest in this work. Would you get to the bottom of the engineer's occupation in France? Balzac presents it in the whole system, with its aspects, disadvantages, and the excellence of the work accomplished. We write to-day of irrigation and of arboriculture as if they were novelties; yet in the waste lands of Montagnac, Balzac found these topics; and what he wrote is the clearest exposition of the subjects.

But, above all, in "The Village Rector" is found the most potent of religious ideas,—the one that God grants pardon to sinners. Balzac had studied and appreciated the intensely human side of Catholicism and its adaptiveness to the wants of mankind. It is religion, with Balzac, "that opens to us an inexhaustible treasure of indulgence." It is true repentance that saves.

The drama which is unrolled in "The Village Rector" is a terrible one, and perhaps repugnant to our sensitive minds. The selection of such a plot, pitiless as it is, Balzac made so as to present the darkest side of human nature, and to show how, through God's pity, a soul might be saved. The instrument of mercy is the Rector Bonnet, and in the chapter entitled "The Rector at Work" he shows how religion "extends a man's life beyond the world." It is not sufficient to weep and moan. "That is but the beginning; the end is action." The rector urges the woman whose sins are great to devote what remains of her life to work for the benefit of her brothers and sisters, and so she sets about reclaiming the waste lands which surround her chateau. With a talent of a superlative order, which gives grace to Veronique, she is like the Madonna of some old panel of Van Eyck's. Doing penance, she wears close to her tender skin a haircloth vestment. For love of her, a man has committed murder and died and kept his secret. In her youth, Veronique's face had been pitted, but her saintly life had obliterated that spotted mantle of smallpox. Tears had washed out every blemish. If through true repentance a soul was ever saved, it was Veronique's. This work, too, has afforded consolation to many miserable sinners, and showed them the way to grace.

The present translation is to be cited for its wonderful accuracy and its literary distinction. We can hardly think of a more difficult task than the Englishing of Balzac, and a general reading public should be grateful for the admirable manner in which Miss Wormeley has performed her task. — *New York Times*.

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BALZAC IN ENGLISH.

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## THE BROTHERHOOD OF CONSOLATION.

(L'ENVERS DE L'HISTOIRE CONTEMPORAINE.)

By HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

1. *Madame de la Chanterie.* 2. *The Initiate.* Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley. 12mo. Half Russia. Price, \$1.50.

There is no book of Balzac which is informed by a loftier spirit than "L'Envers de l'Histoire Contemporaine," which has just been added by Miss Wormeley to her admirable series of translations under the title, "The Brotherhood of Consolation." The title which is given to the translation is, to our thinking, a happier one than that which the work bears in the original, since, after all, the political and historical portions of the book are only the background of the other and more absorbing theme, — the development of the brotherhood over which Madame de la Chanterie presided. It is true that there is about it all something theatrical, something which shows the French taste for making godliness itself histrionically effective, that quality of mind which would lead a Parisian to criticise the coming of the judgment angels if their entrance were not happily arranged and properly executed; but in spite of this there is an elevation such as it is rare to meet with in literature, and especially in the literature of Balzac's age and land. The story is admirably told, and the figure of the Baron Bourliac is really noble in its martyrdom of self-denial and heroic patience. The picture of the Jewish doctor is a most characteristic piece of work, and shows Balzac's intimate touch in every line. Balzac was always attracted by the mystical side of the physical nature; and it might almost be said that everything that savored of mystery, even though it ran obviously into quackery, had a strong attraction for him. He pictures Halpersohn with a few strokes, but his picture of him has a striking vitality and reality. The volume is a valuable and attractive addition to the series to which it belongs; and the series comes as near to fulfilling the ideal of what translations should be as is often granted to earthly things. — *Boston Courier.*

The book, which is one of rare charm, is one of the most refined, while at the same time tragic, of all his works. — *Public Opinion.*

His present work is a fiction beautiful in its conception, just one of those practical ideals which Balzac nourished and believed in. There never was greater homage than he pays to the book of books, "The Imitation of Jesus Christ." Miss Wormeley has here accomplished her work just as cleverly as in her other volumes of Balzac. — *N. Y. Times.*

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BALZAC IN ENGLISH.

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## A GREAT MAN OF THE PROVINCES IN PARIS.

By HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

Being the second part of "Lost Illusions." Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley. 12mo. Half Russia. Price, \$1.50.

We are beginning to look forward to the new translations of Balzac by Katharine Wormeley almost as eagerly as to the new works of the best contemporary writers. But, unlike the writings of most novelists, Balzac's novels cannot be judged separately. They belong together, and it is impossible to understand the breadth and depth of the great writer's insight into human life by reading any one volume of this remarkable series. For instance, we rise from the reading of this last volume feeling as if there was nothing high or noble or pure in life. But what would be more untrue than to fancy that Balzac was unable to appreciate the true and the good and the beautiful! Compare "The Lily of the Valley" or "Seraphita" or "Louis Lambert" with "The Duchesse of Langeais" and "Cousin Bette," and then perhaps the reader will be able to criticise Balzac with some sort of justice. — *Boston Transcript*.

Balzac paints the terrible verities of life with an inexorable hand. The siren charms, the music and lights, the feast and the dance, are presented in voluptuous colors—but read to the end of the book! There are depicted with equal truthfulness the deplorable consequences of weakness and crime. Some have read Balzac's "Cousin Bette" and have pronounced him immoral; but when the last chapter of any of his novels is read, the purpose of the whole is clear, and immorality cannot be alleged. Balzac presents life. His novels are as truthful as they are terrible. — *Springfield Union*.

Admirers of Balzac will doubtless enjoy the mingled sarcasm and keen analysis of human nature displayed in the present volume, brought out with even more than the usual amount of the skill and energy characteristic of the author. — *Pittsburgh Post*.

The art of Balzac, the wonderful power of his contrast, the depth of his knowledge of life and men and things, this tremendous story illustrates. How admirably the rise of the poet is traced; the *crescendo* is perfect in gradation, yet as inexorable as fate! As for the fall, the effect is more depressing than a personal catastrophe. This is a book to read over and over, an epic of life in prose, more tremendous than the blank verse of "Paradise Lost" or the "Divine Comedy." Miss Wormeley and the publishers deserve not congratulations alone, but thanks for adding this book and its predecessor, "Lost Illusions," to the literature of English. — *San Francisco Wave*.

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**Lost Illusions: The Two Poets, and Eve and David.**

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Being the twenty-third volume of Miss Wormeley's translation of Balzac's novels. 12mo. Half Russia. Price, \$1.50.

For her latest translation of the Balzac fiction cycle, Miss Wormeley gives us the first and third parts of "Illusion Perdue," under the caption of "Lost Illusions," namely, "The Two Poets" and "Eve and David." This arrangement is no doubt a good one, for the readers are thus enabled to follow the consecutive fortunes of the Angouleme folk, while the adventures of Eve's poet-brother, Lucien, which occur in Paris and make a tale by themselves, are thus left for a separate publication. The novel, as we have it, then, belongs to the category of those scenes from provincial life which Balzac found so stimulating to his genius. This story, certainly, in some respects takes high rank among them. The character-drawing is fine: Lucien, the ambitious, handsome, weak-willed, selfish, and easily-sinning young bourgeois, is contrasted with David, — a touching picture of the struggling inventor, born of the people and sublimely one-purposed and pure in his life. Eve, the type of a faithful large-brained and larger-hearted wife, who supports her husband through all his hardships with unflinching courage and kindness, is another noble creation. David inherits a poorish printing business from his skin-flint of a father, neglects it while devoting all his time and energy to his discovery of an improved method of making paper; and through the evil machinations of the rival printing firm of the Cointets, as well as the debts foisted on him by Lucien in Paris, he is brought into money difficulties and even into prison. But his invention, although sold at a sacrifice to the cunning Cointets, gets him out of the hole at last, and he and his good wife retire on a comfortable competency, which is augmented at the death of his father into a good-sized fortune. The seamy side of law in the provinces is shown up in Balzac's keen, inimitable way in the description of the winding of the coils around the unsuspecting David and the depiction of such men as the brothers Cointets and the shrewd little petifogging rascal, Petit Claud. The pictures of Angouleme aristocratic circles, too, with Lucien as high priest, are vivacious, and show the novelist's wonderful observation in all ranks of life. The bit of wild romance by which Lucien becomes the secretary of a Spanish grandee lends a fairy-tale flavor to the main episodes. Balzac, in whom is united the most lynx-eyed realism and the most extravagant romanticism, is ever and always one of the great masters in fiction of our century.

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PIERRETTE  
AND  
THE VICAR OF TOURS.  
BY HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

*Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley.*

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In *Pierrette*, which Miss Wormeley has added to her series of felicitous translations from the French master-fictionists, Balzac has made within brief compass a marvellously sympathetic study of the martyrdom of a young girl. *Pierrette*, a flower of Brittany, beautiful, pale, and fair and sweet, is taken as an undesired charge by sordid-minded cousins in Provins, and like an exotic transplanted into a harsh and sour soil she withers and fades under the cruel conditions of her new environment. Incidentally Balzac depicts in vivid colors the struggles of two shop-keepers—a brother and sister, who have amassed a little fortune in Paris—to gain a foothold among the bourgeoisie of their native town. These two become the prey of conspirators for political advancement, and the rivalries thus engendered shake the small provincial society to its centre. Put the charm of the tale is in the portrayal of the character of *Pierrette*, who understands only how to love, and who cannot live in an atmosphere of suspicion and ill-treatment. The story is of course sad, but its fidelity to life and the pathos of it are elements of unfailing interest. Balzac brings a score or more of people upon the stage, shows each one as he or she really is both in outward appearance and inward nature, and then allows motives and circumstances to work out an inevitable result. To watch this process is like being present at some wonderful chemical experiment where the ingredients are mixed with a deft and careful hand, and combine to produce effects of astonishing significance. The social genesis of the old maid in her most abhorrent form occupies much of Balzac's attention in *Pierrette*, and this theme also has a place in the story of *The Vicar of Tours*, bound up in this same volume. The vicar is a simple-minded priest who is happy enough till he takes up his quarters with an old maid landlady, who pesters and annoys him in many ways, and finally sends him forth despoiled of his worldly goods and a laughing-stock for the countryside. There is a great deal of humor in the tale, but one must confess that the humor is of a rather heavy sort, it being weighed down by a dominant satirical purpose. — *The Beacon*.

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## A MEMOIR OF HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

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A complete life of Balzac can probably never be written. The sole object of the present volume is to present Balzac to American readers. This memoir is meant to be a presentation of the man, — and not of his work, except as it was a part of himself, — derived from authentic sources of information, and presented in their own words, with such simple elucidations as a close intercourse with Balzac's mind, necessitated by conscientious translation, naturally gives. The portrait in this volume was considered by Madame de Balzac the best likeness of her husband.

Miss Wormeley's discussion of the subject is of value in many ways, and it has long been needed as a help to comprehension of his life and character. Personally, he lived up to his theory. His life was in fact austere. Any detailed account of the conditions under which he worked, such as are given in this volume, will show that this must have been the case; and the fact strongly reinforces the doctrine. Miss Wormeley, in arranging her account of his career, has, almost of necessity, made free use of the letters and memoir published by Balzac's sister, Madame Surville. She has also, whenever it would serve the purpose of illustration better, quoted from the sketches of him by his contemporaries, wisely rejecting the trivialities and frivolities by the exaggeration of which many of his first chroniclers seemed bent upon giving the great author a kind of opera-bouffe aspect. To judge from some of these accounts, he was flighty, irresponsible, possibly a little mad, prone to lose touch of actualities by the dominance of his imagination, fond of wild and impracticable schemes, and altogether an eccentric and unstable person. But it is not difficult to prove that Balzac was quite a different character; that he possessed a marvellous power of intellectual organization; that he was the most methodical and indefatigable of workers; that he was a man of a most delicate sense of honor; that his life was not simply devoted to literary ambition, but was a martyrdom to obligations which were his misfortune, but not his fault.

All this Miss Wormley has well set forth; and in doing so she has certainly relieved Balzac of much unmerited odium, and has enabled those who have not made a study of his character and work to understand how high the place is in any estimate of the helpers of modern progress and enlightenment to which his genius and the loftiness of his aims entitle him. This memoir is a very modest biography, though a very good one. The author has effaced herself as much as possible, and has relied upon "documents" whenever they were trustworthy. — *N. Y. Tribune.*

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**Albert Savarus, with Paz (La Fausse Maitresse) and Madame Firmiani.** By HONORÉ DE BALZAC. Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley.

There is much in this, one of the most remarkable of his books, which is synonymous with Balzac's own life. It is the story of a man's first love for woman, his inspirer, the source from whom he derives his power of action. It also contains many details on his habits of life and work.

THE three short stories in this volume,—‘Albert Savarus,’ ‘Paz’ and ‘Madame Firmiani’—are chips from that astounding workshop which never ceased its Hephestian labors and products until Balzac was no more. Short stories of this character flew from his glowing forge like sparks from an anvil, the playthings of an idle hour, the interludes of a more vivid drama. Three of them gathered here illustrate as usual Parisian and provincial life, two in a very noble fashion, Balzacian to the core. The third—‘Albert Savarus’—has many elements of tragedy and grandeur in it, spoiled only by an abruptness in the conclusion and an accumulation of unnecessary horrors that chill the reader. It is a block of tragic marble hewn, not to a finish, but to a fine prophetic suggestion of what is to follow if —! The *if* never emerges from conditionality to fulfilment. The beautiful lines and sinuous curves of the nascent statue are there, not fully born of the encasing stone; what sculptors call the ‘tenons’ show in all their visibility—the supports and scaffoldings reveal their presence; the forefront is finished as in a Greek metope or Olympian tympanum, where broken Lapiths and Centaurs disport themselves; but the background is rude and primitive.

In ‘Madame Firmiani’ a few brilliant pages suffice to a perfect picture,—one of the few spotless pictures of this superb yet sinning magician so rich in pictures. It is French nature that Balzac depicts, warm with all the physical impulses, undisguised in its assaults on the soul, ingeniously sensual, odiously loose in its views of marriage and the marriage relation, but splendidly picturesque. In this brief romance noble words are wedded to noble music. In ‘Paz’ an almost equal nobility of thought—the nobility of self-renunciation—is attained. Balzac endows his men and women with happy millions and unhappy natures: the red ruby—the broken heart—blazes in a setting of gold. ‘Paz,’ the sublime Pole who loves the wife of his best friend, a Slav Cræsus, is no exception to the rule. The richest rhetoric, the sunniest colors, fail to counteract the Acherontian gloom of these lives and sorrows snatched from the cauldron of urban and rural France,—a cauldron that burns hotter than any other with its strange Roman and Celtic ardors. Balzac was perpetually dipping into it and drawing from it the wonderful and extraordinary incidents of his novels, incidents often monstrous in their untruth if looked at from any other than a French point of view. Thus, the devilish ingenuity of the jealous woman in ‘Albert Savarus’ would seem unnatural anywhere else than in the sombre French provinces of 1836,—a toadstool sprung up in the rank moonlight of the religious conventual system of education for women; but there, and then, and as one result of this system of repression, it seems perfectly natural. And so does the beautiful self-abnegation of Albert himself, that high-strung soul that could have been born only in nervous and passionate France.

As usual, Miss Wormeley's charming translation floats the reader over these pages in the swiftest and airiest manner.—*The Critic*.

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BALZAC IN ENGLISH.

# An Historical Mystery.

Translated by KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY.

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*An Historical Mystery* is the title given to "Une Ténébreuse Affaire," which has just appeared in the series of translations of Honoré de Balzac's novels, by Katharine Prescott Wormeley. This exciting romance is full of stirring interest, and is distinguished by that minute analysis of character in which its eminent author excelled. The characters stand boldly out from the surrounding incidents, and with a fidelity as wonderful as it is truthful. Plot and counterplot follow each other with marvellous rapidity; and around the exciting days when Napoleon was First Consul, and afterward when he was Emperor, a mystery is woven in which some royalists are concerned that is concealed with masterly ingenuity until the novelist sees fit to take his reader into his confidence. The heroine, Laurence, is a remarkably strong character; and the love-story in which she figures is refreshing in its departure from the beaten path of the ordinary writer of fiction. Michu, her devoted servant, has also a marked individuality, which leaves a lasting impression. Napoleon, Talleyrand, Fouché, and other historical personages, appear in the tale in a manner that is at once natural and impressive. As an addition to a remarkable series, the book is one that no admirer of Balzac can afford to neglect. Miss Wormeley's translation reproduces the peculiarities of the author's style with the faithfulness for which she has hitherto been celebrated. — *Saturday Evening Gazette*.

It makes very interesting reading at this distance of time, however; and Balzac has given to the legendary account much of the solidity of history by his adroit manipulation. For the main story it must be said that the action is swifter and more varied than in many of the author's books, and that there are not wanting many of those cameo-like portraits necessary to warn the reader against slovenly perusal of this carefully written story; for the complications are such, and the relations between the several plots involved so intricate, that the thread might easily be lost and much of the interest be thus destroyed. The usual Balzac compactness is of course present throughout, to give body and significance to the work, and the stage is crowded with impressive figures. It would be impossible to find a book which gives a better or more faithful illustration of one of the strangest periods in French history, in short; and its attraction as a story is at least equalled by its value as a true picture of the time it is concerned with. The translation is as spirited and close as Miss Wormeley has taught us to expect in this admirable series. — *New York Tribune*.

One of the most intensely interesting novels that Balzac ever wrote is *An Historical Mystery*, whose translation has just been added to the preceding novels that compose the "Comédie Humaine" so admirably translated by Miss Katharine Prescott Wormeley. The story opens in the autumn of 1803, in the time of the Empire, and the motive is in deep-laid political plots, which are revealed with the subtle and ingenious skill that marks the art of Balzac. . . . The story is a deep-laid political conspiracy of the secret service of the ministry of the police. Talleyrand, M<sup>lle</sup> de Cinq-Cygne, the Princess de Cadignan, Louis XVIII., as well as Napoleon, figure as characters of this thrilling historic romance. An absorbing love-story is also told, in which State intrigue plays an important part. The character-drawing is faithful to history, and the story illuminates French life in the early years of the century as if a calcium light were thrown on the scene.

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The force and passion of the stories of Balzac are unapproachable. He had the art of putting into half a dozen pages all the fire and stress which many writers, who are still great, cannot compass in a volume. The present volume is an admirable collection, and presents well his power of handling the short story. That the translation is excellent need hardly be said. — *Boston Courier*.

The six stories, admirably translated by Miss Wormeley, afford good examples of Balzac's work in what not a few critics have thought his chief specialty. It is certain that no writer of many novels wrote so many short stories as he; and it is equally as certain that his short stories are, almost without an exception, models of what such compositions ought to be. . . . No modern author, however, of any school whatever, has succeeded in producing short stories half so good as Balzac's best. Balzac did not, indeed, attempt to display his subtlety and deftness by writing short stories about nothing. Every one of his tales contains an episode, not necessarily, but usually, a dramatic episode. The first in the present collection, better known as "La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote," is really a short novel. It has all the machinery, all the interest, all the detail of a regular story. The difference is that it is compressed as Balzac only could compress; that here and there important events, changes, etc., are indicated in a few powerful lines instead of being elaborated; that the vital points are thrown into strong relief. Take the pathetic story of "Colonel Chabert." It begins with an elaboration of detail. The description of the lawyer's office might seem to some too minute. But it is the stage upon which the Colonel is to appear, and when he enters we see the value of the preliminaries, for a picture is presented which the memory seizes and holds. As the action progresses, detail is used more parsimoniously, because the *mise-en-scène* has already been completed, and because, also, the characters once clearly described, the development of character and the working of passion can be indicated with a few pregnant strokes. Notwithstanding this increasing economy of space, the action takes on a swifter intensity, and the culmination of the tragedy leaves the reader breathless.

In "The Atheist's Mass" we have quite a new kind of story. This is rather a psychological study than a narrative of action. Two widely distinguished characters are thrown on the canvas here, — that of the great surgeon and that of the humble patron; and one knows not which most to admire, the vigor of the drawing, or the subtle and lucid psychical analysis. In both there is rare beauty of soul, and perhaps, after all, the poor Auvergnat surpasses the eminent surgeon, though this is a delicate and difficult question. But how complete the little story is; how much it tells; with what skill, and in how delightful a manner! Then there is that tremendous haunting legend of "La Grande Bretèche," a story which has always been turned into more languages and twisted into more new forms than almost any other of its kind extant. What author has equalled the continuing horror of that unfaithful wife's agony, compelled to look on and assist at the slow murder of her entrapped lover? . . . Then the death of the husband and wife, — the one by quick and fiercer dissipation, the other by simple refusal to live longer, — and the abandonment of the accursed dwelling to solitude and decay, complete a picture, which for vividness, emotional force, imaginative power, and comprehensiveness of effects, can be said to have few equals in its own class of fiction. — *Kansas City Journal*.

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# SONS OF THE SOIL.

*Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley.*

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Many critics have regarded "Les Paysans," to which Miss Wormeley, in her admirable translation, has given the title "Sons of the Soil," as one of Balzac's strongest novels; and it cannot fail to impress those who read this English rendering of it. Fifty or sixty years ago Balzac made a profound study of the effects produced by the Revolution upon the peasants of the remote provinces of France, and he has here elaborated these observations in a powerful picture of one of those strange, disguised, but ferocious social wars which were at the time not only rendered possible, but promoted by three potent influences, namely, the selfishness of the rich landholders; the land-hunger and stimulated greed of the peasants; and the calculated rapacity of middle-class capitalists, craftily using the hatreds of the poor to forward their own plots. The first part of "Les Paysans" (and the only part which was published during the author's life) appeared under a title taken from an old and deeply significant proverb, *Qui a terre a guerre*, — "Who has land has war."

It is the account of a guerilla war conducted by a whole country-side against one great land-owner, — a war in which, moreover, the lawless aggressions of the peasantry are prompted, supported, and directed by an amazing alliance between the richest, most unscrupulous, and most powerful of the neighboring provincial magnates, who, by controlling, through family council, the local administration, are in a position to paralyze resistance to their conspiracy. The working out of this deep plot affords the author opportunity for the introduction of a whole gallery of marvellous studies.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to say that this powerful and absorbing story is lifted above the level of romance by the unequalled artistic genius of the author, and that it is at times almost transformed into a profound political study by the depth and acumen of his suggestions and comments. Nor should it be requisite to point out analogies with territorial conditions in more than one other country, which lend to "Les Paysans" a special interest and significance, and are likely to prevent it from becoming obsolete for a long time to come. Of the translation it only need be said that it is as good as Miss Wormeley has accustomed us to expect, and that means the best rendering of French into English that has ever been done. — *New York Tribune.*

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TRANSLATED BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION TO EACH NOVEL BY  
GEORGE FREDERIC PARSONS.

[From *Le Livre, Revue du Monde Littéraire*, Paris, March, 1889.]

There are men so great that humanity passes generations of existences in measuring them. . . . Certain it is that to-day the French Academy makes Balzac's work the theme for its prize of eloquence, that the great writer is translated and commented upon in foreign countries, and that in Paris and even at Tours, his native place, statues are in process of being erected to him. . . . But the marble of M. Chapus, the bronze of M. Fournier, — Balzac sad or Balzac seated, — are of little consequence to the glory of the writer standing before the world, who bore a world in his brain and brought it forth, who was at once the Diderot and the Rabelais of this century, and who, above and beyond their fire, their imagination, their superabounding life, their hilarious spirit, paradoxical and marvellously sagacious as it was, had in the highest degree the mystical gift of intuition, and is able, beyond all others, to open to us illimitable vistas of the Unseen.

It is this side of Balzac's genius which at the present time attracts and preoccupies foreign critics. Mlle. Katharine Prescott Wormeley has undertaken to translate the "Comédie Humaine" into English. She has already published several volumes which show a most intelligent sympathy and a talent that is both simple and vigorous. Lately she translated "La Peau de Chagrin" ("The Magic Skin"), and now, taking another step into the esoteric work of the Master, she gives to the Anglo-Saxon public "Louis Lambert." But she does not venture upon this arduous task without support. Mr. George Frederic Parsons has undertaken in a long introduction to initiate the reader into the meaning hidden, or, we should rather say, encased, in the psychologic study of a lofty soul which ends by inspiring mundane minds with respect for its seeming madness and a deep sense of the Beyond. . . . Many critics, and several noted ones, have so little understood the real meaning of "Louis Lambert" and "Seraphita" that they have wondered why the author gave them a place in the "Comédie Humaine," which, nevertheless, without them would be a temple without a pediment, as M. Taine very clearly saw and said. Mr. Parsons takes advantage of Miss Wormeley's translation to state and prove and elucidate this truth. The commentary may be thought a little long, a little replete, or too full of comparisons and erudite reference; but all serious readers who follow it throughout will never regret that they have thus prepared themselves to understand Balzac's work. We call the attention of the philosophical and theological journals to this powerful study. [Translated.]

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